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HENRY B. BREWSTER (H. B.) HARVEY IN THE 'SINCE'.

AS TIME WENT ON...

BY
ETHEL SMYTH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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DEDICATION

To dedicate your book to an author in token of admiration is an impertinence.

To do it from affection is better. But what if the book turns out badly? That dedication may cost you a valued friendship.

Therefore, avoiding seductive quagmires that begin with an 'a,' such as affection and admiration, I step on to safe ground and declare that solely because this book was written at her suggestion do I venture to offer it

to

VIRGINIA WOOLF.

January 1, 1936.

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AS TIME WENT ON . . .

PROLOGUE

IN the year 1919 I published an autobiography called ' Impressions that Remained,' and strangers have been good enough to enquire from time to time ' When are you going to give us more " Impressions " ? '—a question which, being merely a well-meant conversational gambit, has generally elicited the safe response : ' Oh ! I don't know ! probably never.'

I wrote that book, of which this is the sequel, while doing radiographic work in a French Military Hospital. Locating bits of shell, telling the doctor exactly how deeply embedded they are, and watching him plunge into a live though anæsthetised body the knife that shall prove you either an expert or a bungler, is not a music-inspiring job, but writing memoirs in between whiles was a delightful relief.

Thus it was that ' Impressions ' came into being ; and if they were brought to a conclusion at the commencement of my public music life, it was chiefly because the thread on which my days were strung happened to be music, and nothing would induce me to write a book aimed at the head of the musical reader. One might occasionally dive into the past and fish up something connected with music—about playing my Mass to the old Queen for instance, or the production of *Der Wald* in Germany. But the real interest, if any, lay in the human happening, Mass and Opera

being merely pegs on which to hang what is called 'close-ups' of Balmoral and Berlin ; so there was little danger of boring Mr. and Mrs. Everyman, who, with their families, are the public I really write for.

I think I had always been rather *slow* of hearing, though my friend Harry Brewster once said : ' It's merely that you are deafened by what you are going to say next.' But a few years ago slight yet authentic deafness began to get between me and music. Even when conducting I could not really judge the balance, and listening from the stalls unless you can hear perfectly is more pain than pleasure. Which was tragic, for new music interests me beyond anything on earth and I've always been a good *music* listener, anyhow !

' But you can read a score like a book, can't you ? ' asks the reader. Well, no, I can't, and I believe very few people except conductors, who are always at it, read complicated modern scores as easily as ordinary mortals read ' Alice in Wonderland.' I remember forty years ago going to see the well-known Wagner paladin Hermann Levi, who was ill in bed and buried in MSS. ' I can't *hear* these modern harmonies,' he complained — harmonies that I daresay would go down as easily to-day as ' Hymns Ancient and Modern.' Anyhow, if it's a question of armchair work, give me a book any day.

Occasionally, but very very rarely, I still got pleasure from listening in, and from records, especially if the music were unknown to me. Then, only a few months ago, what is called *distorted hearing* set in ! . . . So good-bye music !

' But,' the reader may remark, ' you can still *compose*, anyhow.' One can, but I confess that to me half the fun of composing has always been *hearing what I have written*. Oh yes, one knows about Beethoven, but I have never met anyone who claims to be in that category, besides which, deafness came to Beethoven when he was a young man and in the full tide of inspiration. Still, in spite of everything

I believe the musician in me might have won through in the end. There was one thing I had always longed to compose before I die ; and if you are still in possession of your senses, gradually getting accustomed, as some people do, to a running accompaniment of noises in your head ; if instead of shrinking from the very thought of music you suddenly become conscious of desire towards it . . . why, then anything may happen . . . and once more you begin to dream dreams . . . !

The final, knock-out blow came from an unexpected quarter . . . from the Argentine Republic, which is still in the throes (though convalescent they say) of a slump, and whence half my income is derived. Composing being for people situated as I am—at least if you wish your work to be performed—a very expensive business, and as it is now a case of earning money rather than losing it, the inevitable happened. Disguised as my banker the blind Fury drew nigh and handed me what looked like a Statement of Account, but which was really the abhorred shears. . . . The thread of music was cut and the god of a lifetime sank out of sight.

How it comes that, for such as me, music is only a cause of expense will be explained in the last chapter of this book, by which time the reader may have acquired faith in the writer's objectivity and perhaps allow that the inevitable has been faced and accepted without rancour. For acceptance is an art that must be mastered if we want to keep our friends for the span of life that remains to us, and presently step off the stage with our self-respect intact. The other day an old Gloucestershire man said to my friend Mr. Gordon Woodhouse : ' When you're my age there's no such thing as digestion . . . only *fermentation* ! ' Nevertheless it is my high hope by spiritual and mental diet to check elderly fermentings and digest my past fairly and squarely.

Of course all wrenches mean pain. But if one who, when a schoolgirl, used to fill penny exercise-books with plays, poems, love-letters (the latter rough drafts to be copied out clean and sent by post), satires, prayers, bursts of invective, and what not, is now able to stand up against Argentina by simply replacing the music-nib of her pen with another sort of nib . . . well, I do not consider that such a one has the right to grumble. Rather should Fate be thanked for providing a second string whereon to play, as well as one can, the tune life is always making up in one's heart.

Many years ago I lit on a tag of wisdom which has been carried about with me like an amulet ever since : ' One must be prepared,' said a friend of Vernon Lee's, ' to begin life all over again an unlimited number of times ' ; which I take to mean, that as long as breath is in your body life need never cease to be a creative effort.

This is a consolatory reflection, for there is no denying that old age takes some tackling. Many writers from Shakespeare downwards have drawn up lists of its major disabilities, but if you are a woman the minor ones are just as tiresome ; for instance, taking thought, perhaps for the first time in your life, as to how to put on your clothes, or, again, the careful training of thinning locks over denuded tracts of country—what a bore ! (I myself have not yet been called upon to master this delicate gymnastic, but an Irish friend of mine once said : ' Well may *I* talk of doing my hair, for I have only one left.') And there is a still more humiliating inverse operation, neglect of which on the part of the three weird sisters caused Banquo for one wild moment to mistake them for three gentlemen. . . . Enough, enough !

But old age has its compensations. You now look on your past with an absolutely impersonal eye. It is as though, perched on a high cliff, you were watching some

strange vessel far out at sea, now in the trough of the waves, now flying from crest to crest, but always a strange vessel. In these pages I mean to tap every available source, old letters, fragments of a diary irregularly kept for about six months—anything and everything. But while this material is for the most part welded into the text, I will not forsake the plan adopted in ‘ Impressions ’ of banking together, in sporadic Letter Sections, any communications whatsoever from the *dramatis personae* that seem to me admirable in themselves, or that complete such sketches of personality as occur in the narrative—a system which surely must commend itself to constitutional skippers.

Finally be it said, that when dealing with certain intimate episodes, it will hardly occur to the writer that the person concerned was a young or youngish woman called Ethel Smyth. The boat is too far away from the shore of youth for the name on the prow to be identified. But in such cases, over each paragraph will be written in invisible ink the motto of mottoes—and how one blesses the Angevin king who bequeathed it to a country that might otherwise have fallen a prey to unrelieved Nonconformist prudery—‘ *Honi soit qui mal y pense !* ’

CHAPTER I

(1877-1885)

ON setting forth to continue memoirs broken off years and years ago, you must either assume that your readers have read and remember the other book—surely an arrogant assumption—or you must ask them, as I do now, to have patience, while, by way of furnishing a clue to what is coming, you sketch briefly the outline of an already told tale.

The final chapters of 'Impressions that Remained' dealt with two deaths ; that of my mother in January 1891, and, a year later, of her who till Fate rent us asunder had been the centre of my German life—or rather of my whole existence—to be reunited with whom was the hope I had lived on ever since. Having said which I will try to relate in a few bald words the story of a tragedy I was unable to get on terms with till the year 1918, when, in the course of writing 'Impressions,' the old dull pain gradually wrote itself out of my system ; so that as last word of that volume I was able to say 'Now I understand.'

In the late 'seventies there lived in Leipzig a very remarkable couple called von Herzogenberg. The husband, Heinrich, an Austrian nobleman and composer, was gradually earning the reputation of being the greatest contrapuntist alive. And, as such, he supplied an interesting foil to the beauty, fascination, and phenomenal musical genius of his wife Elisabeth, *née* von Stockhausen—generally known as 'Frau Lisl'—whose name is familiar throughout

Germany owing to the publication, after their respective deaths, of her correspondence with Brahms.

When in 1877, after years of battle with my father, I landed in Leipzig in order to study music, I soon became what the Germans call 'the child in the house' of this childless couple, and also Herzogenberg's one and only pupil. All Leipzig, all members of the outside music world who passed beneath the portals of their flat in the course of each winter looked upon us, as readers of the Brahms correspondence may remember, as an inseparable trio.

For five years I worked like a demon, always spending the summer at Frimhurst, our Surrey home. Then, in 1882, irresistibly drawn southwards by a furious longing to see Italy, I wintered in Florence where dwelt Lisl's sister Julia, whose marriage with one Henry Brewster—a man eleven years younger than herself, half American, half English, and by education and affinity a Frenchman—was based on a theory any wise woman would adopt under similar circumstances; namely, that if either of them should fall in love with someone else, it was not to be considered a tragedy nor a cause of division, but a turn of the wheel to be dealt with on its merits. In their own strange way they were a devoted couple, and there were two children, a girl and a boy, aged, I think, about six and four.

Almost immediately Harry Brewster fell in love with me, informed Julia of the fact (which appears to have been unnecessary), and with her approval went off to Africa to shoot lions and get over his infatuation. For my part, wholly taken up, as usual, by the woman, I had not the faintest suspicion of the real cause of this sporting expedition, from which he returned shortly before my departure for England, to the best of his belief, and also of Julia's, completely cured.

Now all this time, crippled by a mountaineering accident, I had seen little or nothing of Italy, so adopted with

enthusiasm Julia's suggestion that I should come back again in the winter.

Towards the close of that second stay (May 1884) I found out that I was now in love with Harry Brewster. And if I had never suspected his former feeling for me, still less did I know that, as so often happens with a passion supposed to be cured, his had returned like a strong man armed. I afterwards learned that Julia had foreseen this possibility but full of pride and confidence in her own power she had suggested this second winter as a *tour de force*. When she realised what was happening, urged onwards by the same fate-challenging impulse, she took a quite new departure, and whereas up to then my visits had been strictly rationed, I now was invited constantly to the house. But who can unravel the motives of that most extraordinary and incomprehensible of women?

Eventually the situation was faced and discussed calmly and judicially by all three of us. Julia even proposed his going over by and by to sample English hunting, and incidentally to find out whether the whole affair was or was not a case of vain imaginings. So she said, but in her heart I think she believed that, exposed to the open air, this foolish business would die a natural death. I however declared, in spite of his protestings, that the incident was closed, and left Florence for Berchtesgaden where I joined the Herzogenbergs. Of course, Lisl was informed by me of what had happened; no blame whatsoever had been ascribed to me by Julia, and Lisl and I parted for the summer 'more closely if more tragically knit than ever' (I am quoting from Chapter XXXV of 'Impressions,' where will be found such details of that summer as I could bring myself to give at the time the book was written).

During the course of the winter '84-'85 which I spent at Leipzig, Harry succeeded in persuading me to reopen negotiations, Julia having assured him again and again, so

he said, that she was merely waiting to be certain our mutual feeling was genuine in order to set the crown on their strange compact by giving his union with another woman her blessing. 'And how,' urged Harry, 'can we ascertain anything if the cable is cut between us?'

As a matter of fact, Julia, as before, was marking time. Having failed from the first to judge the nature of his feeling (or, of course, of mine), too proud yet awhile to declare that after all she could not give him the promised freedom, she was gambling on my adherence to my first instinct—the instinct of renunciation to be expected in any decent English girl of my day and upbringing.

It must be understood that Lisl was from the first sceptical as to her sister's conditional acquiescence, and meanwhile my letters to Julia, asking for light and leading elicited nothing but vague theories well wrapped up in slightly frosted metaphysics. Twice did Harry suddenly descend on Leipzig to argue with me. [I remember one 'argument' which took place in the draughty covered court leading to my lodgings. It was pitch dark, there were ten degrees, Réaumur, of frost, and we said good night to each other from 11 P.M. to 3 A.M.] During these visits he succeeded in overriding my disbelief in Julia's consent, and if I did not succeed in overriding the scepticism of Lisl she ceased to fight me on the subject—a fact she never forgave herself. It was a most miserable winter for both her and me.

Then came the end, as related in 'Impressions.' That summer she and Julia met, and for the first time spoke of the matter. Julia, calm and undefeated, declared that the 'discussion' between her and her husband was still proceeding, and that nothing was decided, but Lisl saw that her heart was breaking. Reproached bitterly by their passionately jealous old mother, who from the first had warned Lisl against 'that wicked English girl,' she was bidden by mother and brother to choose between them and me; and whether

expressed or not, there was no longer any doubt as to Julia's wishes. In Austria the family is sacrosanct; Baroness von Stockhausen was as brilliant, as violent, as devil-ridden an old woman as I have ever met, in or out of literature, and Lisl had a mortal dread of conflicts, knowing instinctively, I suppose, as do most sufferers from valvular disease of the heart, that agitation may cause sudden death. All this I did not realise till many years later . . . but before the autumn leaves had fallen I was cast out of Lisl's life and had cast Harry out of mine.

If at this point readers should ask how such a situation could arise between three people presumably of good faith and in possession of their senses, the answer is that where elemental forces such as love, pride and jealousy are in play, the wild parabolas that human nature is capable of executing defy calculation. Moreover, all who knew them would agree that two of the personalities concerned could not be called ordinary mortals. Every individual, including every one of my readers, is far more peculiar, far more mysterious than their friends suspect; but like the Loch Ness Monster the Brewsters were in a category by themselves.

The lapse of time, and the increasing feeling of impersonality I spoke of some pages back, make it possible to tell the story more fully to-day than sixteen years ago when the account given may have left many readers uncertain as to what had actually happened. Also as this present manuscript heaps up things will become clearer still, for what is autobiography but an unfolding? Yet the inner history of that fantastic triangular duel, that mad essay in three-part counterpoint, will never be told now. H. B. always maintained that some day the correspondence between the three protagonists ought to be put together and allowed to speak for itself. Indeed, after Julia's death he sometimes spoke of tackling this task. But his own books, and later on the writing of the libretto of my opera *The Wreckers*

(originally written in French under the name of '*Les Naufrageurs*') and also of another play, engrossed him, and there seemed to be no particular hurry. Then, suddenly, in 1908, after a short illness he died; and I doubt not that his son Christopher, to whom I was much attached and who had been devoted to his mother, destroyed her letters and possibly his father's before his own death, which occurred—alas, not after a short illness!—seven or eight years ago.

CHAPTER II

(1885-1891)

THE story of the bitter years that followed the severance from Lisl and H. B.—years during which I was sustained by the hope that since the rift between the Brewsters, who for some time had not been meeting, seemed gradually closing, Lisl might some day be able to see me again—all this is set down in the section of my memoirs entitled, ‘In the Desert.’ My mother shared this hope. In 1885 she had come out to Leipzig to visit me. No one ever succumbed more wholeheartedly to Lisl’s charm than she, and it seemed to her inconceivable that a relation to witness which had made her so happy that even her constitutional jealousy was in abeyance, could ever be broken beyond repair.

The winter following the break (1885-86) was passed by me at home, with plenty of hunting thrown in; the next winter, Herzogenberg having become Professor at the Berlin Hochschule, I went back to Leipzig, where I found that none of my old friends really believed I had played an ugly and treacherous part. I suppose they knew there is such a thing as being drawn, whether we will or no, into a whirlpool cunningly prepared for us by Destiny. And again the next winter (1887-88) was passed at Leipzig.

As I said, it was my habit to spend the summer months at home; and during the summer of 1888 it became evident that my mother was feeling the loneliness of Frimhurst, for

by now my five sisters had homes of their own, and Bob, my brother, the youngest of us all, was coaching for the Army. She was ageing, not in good health, unfitted, like all women of her generation, to carry on any intellectual pursuit, devoured by an amount of brains and emotional capacity that would have sufficed to equip a dozen women; and, of course, she was terribly unhappy. And, needless to say, in those days there was no place for a woman in the many county activities thanks to which time never hung heavy on the hands of a retired general officer like my father.

Given all this, instead of returning in October to Germany, I determined to try another English winter. Alas! it was a failure. To live an artist's life at Frimhurst was an impossibility. The constant presence of a violent spirit, uncontrolled and uncontrollable such as my mother's, was devastating—all the more so because, loving her, I was harrowed by the spectacle of her moral suffering, and maddened by constant scenes in which my violence equalled hers and was the subject of bitter remorse afterwards. By the summer of 1889 I knew that if my musician's soul was to be saved I must get back to my spiritual home, Germany, particularly as none of the musical world in my own country appeared to have any use for me. My mother, who knew exactly how it was with me, even pressed me to go. Bob had passed his examination, and was to join his regiment, the 21st Hussars, in India in the spring of 1890. But she urged that she would have him for many months yet; that the married daughters and their young children would come to stay at Frimhurst, that she would not be in the least lonely and so on. As I was never weary of saying in 'Impressions,' at the difficult moments of life the bigness of her soul came into play; then she never failed us.

So in the autumn I departed for Munich. I had good friends there, among others Hermann Levi, now Director and first conductor at the Court Theatre, who would

always contrive to give me a run-through of my tentative orchestral efforts. There if anywhere I should be able once more to take up my old music life.

It was no good ; the thought of my mother left me no peace. Thus it came about that directly after Christmas, very ill myself, I and my big yellow dog Marco—half St. Bernard, half various other kinds of dog—struggled back across Europe to a wonderful home welcome. Throughout my life I have never ceased to thank Providence for inspiring an act of faithlessness to my music which a few short weeks previously would have seemed to me the one unforgivable crime.

In past days no house had been big enough to contain me and this mother—victim of frustrated genius—whom in one way I loved more than anyone in the world. But in Munich, partly (I believe) thanks to the frequentation of a girl I loved very dearly, Pauline Trevelyan, I had gradually found again my long mislaid religious faith, and now for the first time in our mutual history, perfect peace reigned between my mother and me. Nevertheless, the remorse that surges up in the heart at the thought of other stormier years will never die. Not that there was anything special to reproach oneself with ; those who remember my portrait of her will concede that given the violence of our respective temperaments things could not have been otherwise. But memories of harshness towards those you deeply loved and by whom you were loved as deeply, are memories that time has no power to soften.

In the account given in 'Impressions' of these lean years I stated that until a certain day in 1890, five years after our parting, there had been no communication between Harry and me. But I had forgotten a pregnant incident. A moment had come—I think it must have been in 1887—when, realising that although Casa Brewster had re-established itself more or less, Lisl would never be per-

mitted—even if she desired it—to resume intercourse with me, I had written to Harry *via* his sister (whose acquaintance I had made in Florence and subsequently renewed) to say that I found it impossible to take up my music life, could hold out no longer, and was now ready to see him again. His reply was that for us to come together under the shadow of defeat would belie the high hopes with which this venture had been started. Let us struggle up to the surface of the flood that had engulfed us ; not till then should we have the right to meet.

It was soon after this passing weakness that, thanks to Edith Davidson, wife of the Dean of Windsor, whose younger brother had married my eldest sister, I made the acquaintance of Mrs. Benson, wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury ; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that if during the early years of probation I kept my head above water, it was thanks to her friendship. But alas ! as time went on, when courage and hope began to return and with them power for work, fundamental differences in our natures and outlook became increasingly manifest. Even during the worst period I had often warned her that the broken, utterly defeated being she was extricating out of the clutches of despair was not the authentic Ethel Smyth ; and I remember telling her we were like two trees whose upper branches, occasionally mingling, gave the illusion of one tree, whereas their roots were far, far apart.

But such remarks left no trace in the mind of one exulting in the exercise of her special genius, for Mrs. Benson's mission in life was the healing and directing of sick souls. These cures were pursued tirelessly, but on her own lines, and not without irritation would I call her *clientèle* 'the patients,' and the quarter-sheets of notepaper, on which were inscribed in her clear scholarly script the words of counsel or comfort that kept the patients going, were nicknamed by me 'prescription paper.' And I harboured a suspicion that for her I was less a human being in need

of human affection than 'a case'; a state of things I bitterly resented.

Oddly enough it was on sacred ground that our first serious divergencies made themselves felt. Mrs. Benson's religion was Evangelical bordering on Nonconformity, and from youth upwards I had had a special horror of Low Church views and ways; but this was of no consequence as long as I myself was still in the bonds of German scepticism. When, however, in 1889, religious faith came back in a flood, it once more took the old form of what was then called High Church—now better styled Anglo-Catholicism—a fact that did not make for harmony. Indeed I got on far better with Mrs. Benson when a disbeliever than after my return to the fold, which, I think, throws an amusing side-light on human nature. No one was more humble-hearted than she, but still she was an Archbishop's wife, and most of the patients were of a hyper-evangelical persuasion!

But the real difficulty lay deeper.

The best judges, from Mr. Gladstone downwards, were wont to affirm that Mrs. Benson's brain was the finest in London, and her moral equipment, her wit, her sense of humour and many of her other attributes were on the same high level. But one ingredient was lacking; in her veins ran not one drop of artistic blood. As wife of the Archbishop she was in easy contact with most of the celebrities of the day, and must sometimes have come across an artist; but perhaps when Art-Lions dine at Lambeth they pare their claws. Anyhow she seemed to me to have less idea of what goes on in an artist's soul than might reasonably be looked for in a person of quite ordinary intelligence, and certainly such Muses as had deigned to assist one April 23, when I was born, had never been within a mile of beloved Mrs. Benson's cradle.

Then came a crisis. That spring, just five years after our

parting, and utterly unexpectedly as far as I was concerned, Harry and I met again.

The occasion was a Crystal Palace Concert at which, on April 26, Auguste Manns introduced me to my countrymen with the production of a *Serenade* in four movements. And when I came forward to bow my acknowledgments, lo ! in the fourth row, seated just behind my mother, was Harry !

Except for one detail, of which more presently, he had not changed ; still the same pale clean-cut face, the dreamy far-apart brown eyes, the abundance of soft fluffy fair hair ; still the striking-looking man he had always been. As Maurice Baring has described him, *à rebours* like a Rembrandt portrait, though I myself consider his prototype was Titian's ' Venetian Nobleman ' in the Pitti Gallery.

After the concert we had tea together and discussed matters. His idea was that if this should prove to be the beginning of my serious professional career, it might be possible to obtain Julia's consent to our resuming intercourse, more especially since, with a view to helping him to make friends with English authors (for he was now writing a good deal) it was the intention of his sister, Kate de Terrouenne, to spend a few months every year in London. Julia, he thought, must surely allow it would be silly and hysterical for us to avoid each other, to which I replied that if his prognostic was correct I had no further objections to raise.

At that moment he was bound for America on a short business trip, and on his return through London he made no attempt to see me, for so far no answer from Julia had been received. He found one waiting for him, however, when he reached his sister's château in France, and its drift was that she objected to our meeting. Of correspondence there was no mention, so we decided to take silence for consent. ' Her letter,' he wrote, ' shows no distress or irritation. It is just a repetition of arguments which,

if ever, could only have force to my mind when marriage has been embarked on as a natural humanising social state, not when it has been from the first a half-natural, half-supernatural affair.'

If the news of that meeting at the Crystal Palace had been a great shock to Mrs. Benson, a far greater one was to gather that we were contemplating a renewal of relations, though merely *via* the post. She had believed, and so perhaps had I, that no matter what Julia might do or say that chapter was closed for ever. And with her distress was mingled, I fancy, a sense of having been defrauded ; as some great physician might feel who without hesitation or fee had given months of his valuable time to a dying man, had dragged him out of the jaws of death, had assumed that the austere diet prescribed would be rigidly adhered to, and now finds his patient embarked on a course of lobsters, roast beef, and champagne. But the simile is frivolous, for, as Mrs. Benson saw things, nothing less than my eternal salvation was at stake.

However she was an optimist, and for a long time yet our relation, though on grave lines, was generally shot through with streaks of the irrepressible chaff that ever bubbled up in contact with a Benson. For instance I had sent her a Programme Book of that concert and remember her delight over a phrase in the Analytical Notes—something about *a loud allusion to a former subject in the bass*. 'I do not profess to be musical,' she wrote, 'but I think I should have been quite at home at that passage. It's a trait of yours I know so very well !'

Nor was she the only person who was astonished at the peculiarities of musical jargon. A clerical nephew of ours wrote to my mother that as far as he could make out someone had made a syncopated attack on someone else's wind, to which there was a discreet allusion in the treble. And our old friend Lady Jane Taylor remarked that my *Serenade* was all very well, but what one really wanted was 'a real

good song.' I suggested that Grieg and Schubert and Brahms had given us a few. 'Oh, I don't mean that sort of song,' cried her ladyship, 'but something that takes the world by storm, like *In the Gloaming, O my darling!* I believe the composer of that song got a thousand pounds down!' And to my protests she replied: 'I don't know how it is with *you*, my dear Ethel, but *I* read both *Shakespeare* and *Punch!* Ha, ha, ha!' I was very fond of Lady Jane, but this sort of thing, frequently met with, false analogy and all, in our part of the world, was sometimes hard to bear.

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Seeing that this year, 1890, with the return of my great friend into my life my *Vita Nuova* began, perhaps this is the moment to say a little more about the person who is still the pivot of my existence inasmuch as whenever confronted with doubts and difficulties of a certain kind, I involuntarily ask myself, 'What would Harry have said?'

The world knows a little more about him to-day than in 1918 when 'Impressions' was published, or than in 1922 when a charming sketch of him appeared in Maurice Baring's 'Puppet Show of Memory'; but at that time all his books, except perhaps 'L'Âme Païenne,' were out of print.

Then a long cherished dream of mine came true. In 1930, in connexion with a choral work I wrote, the text of which is taken from his second book, 'The Prison,' that book was republished by Messrs. Heinemann, and in the memoir I wrote as preface there is a letter from Professor Macmurray, expressing his amazement that so profound and exquisite a philosophical writer should not have been even a name to him, and that 'thoughts for which the world is only now ripe' should have been conceived fifty years ago by an utterly unknown man.

Another dream of mine is that 'Theories of Anarchy and of Law,' his first, and according to Professor Macmurray

his best book, shall also be reprinted—and, lastly, that the letters of one whom Henry James used to describe as the last of the Great Epistolarists be edited and published. Arthur Benson was the first to suggest this, when, in 1923, he wrote to me that the specimens given in 'Impressions' were among the most interesting and delightful letters he had ever seen. 'I hardly knew Brewster,' he went on to say, 'but had a very vivid impression, and these letters seem to me quite wonderful—an extraordinary perception together with an amazing balance and felicity of phrase.¹ If many were of that quality he must have been among the first class of letter writers. Could more of them appear?' (A good many more will be found in this book, and as for editing a volume of them some day, well, unlikelier things have happened !)

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Meanwhile, during the summer of 1890 what was for me a momentous event took place, Mrs. Benson and Harry met at Aix !

His point of view was well known to her, for when 'Theories of Anarchy and of Law' had come out, knowing that Maggie Benson loved metaphysics, and held with Plato (and H. B.) that dialogue is the only possible medium of philosophic discussion, I had sent them a copy, pointing out that the book had been written to show Julia, who up to now had understood one language only, that of metaphysics, that from first to last his action had been in accordance with the principles they jointly professed. But Julia's views had been gradually changing ; she was by then openly taking the field as 'gardien du foyer' (guardian of the hearth)—an astounding new development—and of course was impervious to metaphysical subtleties. The book had interested the Bensons immensely, and while deprecating the application of such a philosophy to concrete domestic problems, they eagerly seized the chance of making

¹ Two of these letters are reprinted here, Letter Section I, p. 72.

the philosopher's acquaintance. (Perhaps, too, Mrs. Benson hoped to persuade him to break off our correspondence !)

The meeting was a great success in so far as he was delighted with her quick intelligence, her humour, and her dialectical skill ; and it is no exaggeration to say that she fell completely under the charm of his personality. But of course neither converted the other. And in order to complete the tale of H. B.'s relations with Mrs. Benson, I will say here that when, in the following November, my particular friend in the family, her eldest daughter Nelly died, for weeks afterwards 'The Prison,' which had just appeared, was hardly ever out of her hand. This she bade me tell him, and I think nothing ever gave him greater pleasure.

It seemed, and it still seems strange to me, that so strict a moralist should have been able at such a time to cling to the hand of one whom she must have considered the most immoral of men. But I suppose the altitude of his thought routed her logic. Also I think she had the power of evading inconvenient issues, a gift which no doubt great prelates and their wives are obliged to cultivate. So at least it appeared to me some years later when Women's Suffrage came along !

I promised that throughout this book music would be kept in the background, but an occasional reference will do no harm, and certain letters I wrote to my brother in India are amusing as bearing on the inception of a musical career in the Land of one's Fathers in the year 1890.

I had made a really good start that spring, not only with the *Serenade* but with an *Overture to Antony and Cleopatra*—also produced by Manns, and later by Henschel at the London Symphony Concerts he had founded. The orchestration of both these pieces had commended itself greatly to Hermann Levi at a run-through in Munich, and the English Press is always kind to beginners. But alas !

except these two German friends, not one of the Faculty would look at these works or me. Trios, Quartettes, Overtures, Cantatas, Sonatas for violin or for 'cello, etc., etc., were presently being hawked about here, there and everywhere, but the only person out of whom I struck a spark was Sir Charles Hallé, who became my enemy for life owing to my impertinence in going on entreating that a certain MS. score, *for which I had prepaid postage*, might be returned !

And oh ! the piteous and innocent optimism displayed in these letters : 'L. is deeply impressed by the *Song of Love* and quite sure it will be done at the Leeds Festival.' . . . 'The Chairman of the Worcester Festival Committee says I needn't worry—all will be well' . . . 'Stanford says all I have to do is etc., etc. . . . 'Hubert Parry told Mimi von Glehn that *without the faintest doubt*, etc., etc. All hot air of course, as by degrees I found out.

But what staggered me most was the contrast between English music life as it was in the final decade of the last century and the real thing as I had known it in Germany, one of my first eye-openers being the Norwich Festival that autumn, for which I stayed with the syncopated-wind cousin—a dear fellow—and his peculiarly odious wife. I hadn't much to tell my brother about the music, but plenty about that woman, whose husband felt impelled to inform me on the second day that she *did* sometimes take 'insane dislikes to people.'

Yet her parsimony outraged me even more than her rudeness, for they were exceedingly well off, and I wrote passionately on the subject to my brother.

E. S. TO BOB SMYTH.

1890.

"Yesterday we came back from the Festival at 4, had had no luncheon and were famished, but all she did was remark that tea was at 5, that fasting was wholly a matter of habit, and that some people mind it more than others ! She has

a hideous bald bumpy forehead from which her hair is dragged back as by a steam winch, and glaring at my fringe she remarked that she herself preferred the *classic* style of head-dress, and could not conceive how people could imitate the servants by wearing fringes. I replied with sugary sweetness that to find people can be so fastidious on the subject of fashions in head-dress though buried in a remote country parish was truly delightful. After which, thank goodness, I shall not be invited here again."

[Nor was I, for shortly afterwards she went raving mad, poor thing.]

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The incidents of the closing weeks of 1890 have been told elsewhere ; our Christmas party at which the Henschels were our guests ; my mother's heroic and deeply moving effort not to be a kill-joy ; her sudden illness, and, on January 13, 1891, her death. A day dawned exactly a year later, when, thinking of the tenderness of her heart, the vividness of her imagination, I was glad she had been saved the pain of knowing that the hope I lived on would never be fulfilled—that Lisl and I were never again to meet in this world.

Fortunately Captain Hippisley, husband of my fourth sister Violet, was about to be quartered four miles off at Aldershot, and in order to mitigate the loneliness of the house for my father, the Hippisleys consented to take up their abode at Frimhurst. Just then I myself was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and my elder sister, Mary Hunter—in those days, as she had been when we were children, my own special sister—suggested carrying me off with her to Hammam Rh'ira, sulphur baths not far from Algiers, the cure to be completed by an expedition in the Desert.

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But before we started I was in for a fantastic day and night at Addington where the Bensons were then installed.

Ever since his famous Lincoln Judgment my respect for the Archbishop, of whom I was terrified, as one always is of people who are never at their ease, knew no bounds ; but unfortunately I was one of his many pet aversions. Still, in condescending moments, he would point out to his family in my presence, that I was a *very sound Churchwoman*, and on this insecure dogmatic basis I founded a quaking hope that in time his heart might soften towards me. Let the following letter be the measure of such fatuous optimism.

E. S. TO BOB SMYTH.

January 31, 1891.

"I stayed at Addington last week and had a regular shindy with His Grace, at least he had with me. When Mrs. Benson said 'Will you take Ethel in to dinner?' he looked at me as if I were a toad before complying. Presently he asked my opinion on some ethico-musical point, kept on carping at my answers and finally said, 'I really don't know what the drift of your argument is, as I have been wholly occupied in noting the fact that you have used the expression *that sort of thing* seven times in one minute.' Pleasant wasn't it? I was quite civil but firmly stuck to my point in spite of his continually exclaiming 'That is bosh!' (This from one who is ever rebuking me for 'using slip-shod English'—*i.e.* slang!) The chaplains were white with amazement and Mrs. Benson and Maggie intensely uncomfortable. Finally he declared peremptorily that he would discuss music no longer.

After a decent interval of conversation with the chaplain on my right, I shifted the ground to a liturgical work I had been reading, concerning which the Archbishop had sent me a condescending message to the effect that it was 'unfair.' When I named the book and asked in what respect he considered it unfair, he stared in amazement as if he didn't know what I was talking about, so I mildly reminded him of his message and asked if he meant *historically* unfair.

ARCHBISHOP : Pray what may historically unfair mean ?

E. S. : I mean unfair as to the use the author makes of historical elucidation (!) for as layman, unversed in rubrical history, I can't judge of his methods of employing it.

ARCHBISHOP : I should have thought it patent to anyone that the book is untrustworthy (implying that I am a fool).

Thereupon I quoted a certain important argument of the authors turning on the particular use of a particular rubric in the Missal and asked if that was so ?

ARCHBISHOP (*scathingly*) : It would take an expert a week to decide that question.

E. S. : Just so ; hence my remark that a layman cannot be expected to judge of the historical fairness of the book.

Distinct score for me, which His Grace acknowledged by saying '*That is very true !*'

Maggie says he is often taken that way, in which case she invariably turns sulky, but that she never saw him as bad as that night.

In a way it is flattering to be such a very red rag to that bull and strange to say I like him better now than I ever did before—perhaps because I have had the satisfaction of putting him in the wrong ; or perhaps because of his penitence next day which was rather touching, and took the form of insisting on conducting me *in to luncheon* on his arm ! I might have been Adeline, Duchess of Bedford ! ”¹

More than ever in need of calm and rest after this agitating visit, early in February Mary bore off what remained of me to Algeria.

¹ An evangelical friend of the Bensons.

CHAPTER III

(SPRING AND SUMMER 1891)

ALTHOUGH in the Epilogue to 'Impressions' indications were given as to how life shaped itself after my mother's death (including brief mention of an event that remodelled my whole existence—the death, a year later, of Elisabeth von Herzogenberg), it was at the moment we have now reached that the book of which this is the sequel practically came to an end. And as from henceforth life at Frimhurst wore a slightly different aspect, now, while Mary and I are on the high seas, is a good moment for compiling a short 'Who's Who' of the *Smyth Family Robinson*, as Dick Hippisley used to call us.

In spite of the rumpusses usual in large families we were a very united lot ; and neither warfare on a large scale, involving the departure of the soldier contingent for the seat of hostilities, nor matrimony, nor any other shattering incidents had so far loosened the bond between us. My two elder sisters were established in the far north. Beloved Alice Davidson lived at Muirhouse, the enchanting home of her husband's parents on the Firth of Forth. Mary Hunter, the beauty of the family, who for many years was financially and otherwise my stand-by in my musical ventures and who afterwards became a well-known lover of pictures and a lavish hostess, was at that time hibernating in County Durham. And season after season, whenever I was for a brief spell in England, did my generous, hard-riding brother-in-law Charlie Hunter mount me.

Nina, my next sister, four years younger than me, had married a neighbouring young squire and therefore was an integral part of the Frimhurst scene. For this reason, and also because I was always specially fond of her, I shall permit myself a full-length portrait of Nina Hollings—an original if ever there was one.

She was one of those people who habitually go dead straight for any end that attracts them, no matter how fantastic. And once Nina started no one could stop her, least of all her husband, Herbert, who, as so often happens in these cases, was of an orthodox and methodical turn of mind, averse by nature from improvisations, from wild statements, and from still wilder expenditure. He had done wonders at Winchester both in cricket and football, had played racquets for his college at Oxford, and only just missed taking a double first. Now a J.P. and pillar of the Conservative Association, he was looked upon as the natural successor of my father in all county matters. But nevertheless he was powerless to deflect Nina by one hair's breadth from her course, and could only periodically breathe a hope that she was 'not going to do anything to make herself conspicuous.'

Yet she generally contrived to pull things off somehow because she was pretty and had a way with her ; and our Uncle, the Rev. Dr. Brodrick Scott, Headmaster of Westminster, pressing her plump form to his bosom with rather more than avuncular fervour, would often remark : 'If only, my dear child, the ingenuity you display in *getting out of scrapes* could be employed in *keeping out of scrapes* !'

The Nina Saga would require a chapter to itself ; here I will only give a few details to show how, if written, it would run.

She was good at all games, but so casual that rather than bother to get into position she would successfully return an impossible serve from an impossible stance. At cricket she was a redoubtable bat and bowler. At hockey,

when really determined to get the ball, woe betide all in her path. At golf, taken up as a whim merely because she was under the charm of the then lady champion, she at once entered for an International Competition and was in the final.

On one occasion, having been told that all children can swim if thrown into the water young enough, she cast her two small boys into the lake, and finding the experiment looked dubious, stalked in after them and bore them up to the house, one under each arm. It was Sunday morning after church and she was arrayed in black satin and bugles. And the only comment of a placid elderly relation who had been watching these proceedings was : ' Dear me, Nina, what a determined woman you are.' She always succeeded in anything she attempted ; at Frimley Fair, after watching the failure of several brawny youths to ' ring the bell at the top,' she picked up the hammer and did it without effort. At one moment the craze was making fireworks ; and when the eldest boy, recovering from something very like brain fever, had been relegated by the doctor to solitary confinement in the nursery, by way of relieving the tedium of the sickroom his mother laid a train of gunpowder opposite his window and blew up a round flower-bed full of geraniums, calceolarias and lobelia.

But the sort of thing that most highly tried her husband was the discovery, when dinner was announced, and a large Ascot Week party were assembled in the hall, that the hostess had forgotten the whole affair and had gone off to spend the night with her latest ' culte ' (I think it was the lady golf champion). And I remember an occasion during the holidays when in the kindness of her heart she had written at the instance of a Spanish friend to an unknown French lady, begging her to come to luncheon twice a week and give a French lesson to the children. But she not only forgot all about it when the time came, but had omitted to mention the matter to anyone ; thus, walking

into the dining-room on the stroke of one o'clock, my brother-in-law found the children sitting in awed silence with a negress who spoke no English. I don't think anything ever amused our illustrious neighbour the Empress Eugénie, who was much attached to the unfortunate Herbert Hollings, more than that incident.

But if anyone thinks Nina must have been a lunatic, they are greatly mistaken. A magnificent horsewoman, later an intrepid car driver with a passion for charging up perpendicular Welsh hills—while you had to hop out at intervals and shove boulders behind the wheels—she and her friend Lady Helena Gleichen the painter raised a mobile ambulance outfit during the war and were decorated for valour on the Italian front. She is an admirable political speaker with charming voice and enunciation, and at election time used to find it possible to tell devastating home-truths to Welsh miners and communists without putting their backs up ; but now she and Helena live together in Gloucestershire. She was also far and away the most naturally musical of my family, but as time went on they all thought well to leave that department to me.

After Nina came Violet, married as I said to Dick Hippisley of the Royal Engineers. This is the sister who during their engagement begged her *fiancé*, a student of both philosophy and mathematics—not an unusual combination—to 'explain to her in two words the system of Zoroaster.' I apologise for adding that this sister, too, was very pretty, but only last week a contemporary of mine remarked : 'You certainly were a very good-looking family,' and if so, why not say so? Violet was altogether a charmer, very kind, exceedingly amusing, and according to her great admirer H. B., the best brain of us all.

Of Nelly, the last of the sisters, eight years younger than myself, I knew less in those days (though we made up for it afterwards) than any of the five. When she came

out I was almost always in Germany, and after her marriage in 1888 to Hugh Eastwood of the King's Dragoon Guards, they went straight off to India. Hugh was the delightful person who, some years later, when I asked why one of his girls, then aged six and eight, should not marry one of my 'beastly foreigners' as he called them, replied with his peculiarly sweet smile, 'Why not a gorilla?'

Bob, the youngest of us all, was now in India with his regiment, the 21st Hussars (later changed into Lancers), and as he comes back to England towards the end of this book, a sketch of him can wait. When he had gone—it was in the spring of 1890—my mother, who adored him, said to me quietly, 'I shall never see Bob again.' Nor did she.

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Herewith the family list is complete; but before going farther I must mention our neighbour, the Empress Eugénie, who ever since she came to live at Farnborough Hill (which was a couple of miles off) had been wonderfully kind to me and mine, and who, later on, helped me both directly and indirectly in my career as musician as much as anyone I have ever known. At this time she was about 67, still beautiful and indescribably graceful, her vitality, her physical activity and above all her passionate interest in life, being such as many women half her age might envy. In another book of mine, 'Streaks of Life,' I drew as good a portrait of her as it was in me to draw, so will not attempt another here. But she will reappear again and again in these pages, for till her death in 1920 she was one of the most precious, the most engrossingly interesting figures in my world, and no one who has known her ever becomes reconciled to her loss.

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On arriving at Algiers one reflected that though sea air is doubtless good for overwrought nerves, anything less like a rest cure could not be conceived than crossing that odious inland sea (which, going by the map only, I had

hitherto looked on as a mill pond) in one of the greyhound-like boats, built for speed and rolling only, that in those days plied between France and her principal colony. One of the greatest joys in life, a joy that increases as years go on—and you can't say that of many joys—is to step on shore after almost any sea voyage. Arrived at Algiers these feelings assumed delirious proportions, partly, let me add, because it is a very beautiful, and for one who comes in touch with things oriental for the first time, a very exciting arrival.

We had a good two months before us, and the climax of the expedition was to be making the acquaintance of a great Arab chief to whom the Empress had given us a letter. During the Empire five or six representatives of a semi-religious order of Cherifs, all directly descended from Mahomet, had been sumptuously entertained at the Tuileries—a new departure which, I believe, greatly shocked the Faubourg St. Germain. This particular Cherif, Ben Ali, was the head of them all, and luckily for us when we arrived at Algiers he was in his country house, miles away in the desert ; so he asked us to spend a night there when Hammam Rhi'ra should have been absolved.

The following letters from myself to H. B. and my brother respectively, deal with incidents the memory of which needs no reviving by the study of contemporary documents, but here they are.

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Hotel Continental, Algiers.
February 26, 1891.

“ . . . This hotel is almost out in the country and exceedingly comfortable. Just below us are Arab Baths now occupied by a chief and his eighty wives. The *piscine* is about 10 feet square and I go in and look at the women screaming and tumbling about in it—all stark naked and not at all minding my being there. The religious ceremony gone through yesterday amused me so intensely that at

the risk of such an Arabian as yourself knowing all about it, I must describe it. Anyhow, you can't have *seen* it; there I have the advantage.

The whole thing is a test of conjugal fidelity, though how the poor wives have a chance of being unfaithful I don't quite see. They work themselves up in the way you know of, shrieking and barking, into a sort of hypnotic condition, and then, if they have been faithful, they see the Prophet. I failed to find out how the woman who is watching the subject knows at what moment the vision has been vouchsafed, but she then summons the husband, who comes in looking very bored, and holds a saucer of stifling incense under the faithful one's nose and mouth, apparently suffocating her as a reward for virtue. But this proceeding appears to afford her the keenest satisfaction when she comes to and is embraced and congratulated by the other women, and her reputation is henceforth established. Oh, wonderful simplicity! If European husbands would accept the test, how many couples of my acquaintance would I not urge to come here! Two children of the woman who had the vision touched me—dangling their little legs in the water and trying to play at splashing each other, but ever and anon stopping to look with pained horrified little faces at their struggling, barking parent. I gave them *sous*, to the great gratification of the father who seemed rather pleased than otherwise at my contemplating the stock of charms of which he is lord. But even he had the dignity no male Arab seems to lack. In this country I often think of Cleopatra's rider to her question as to whether Antony's wife had dignity: 'Remember, if e'er thou look'dst on majesty.' Since I have been here I have indeed looked on majesty, though only male majesty so far. . . ."

.
E. S. TO BOB SMYTH.

March 28, 1891.

" . . . Imagine, I have seen a perfectly lovely woman, 'la belle Fatma,' queen of the *cocottes indigènes* here. The

one we saw in Paris was a fraud, this one being in prison here just then for having got rid of her seventh husband under very suspicious circumstances (Bluebeard's wives avenged at last). She is like a beautiful tiger, but strange to say the face is very sweet and lovable ; full of life and movement too, wherein she differs from any Arab male or female I have ever seen.

We went with the discreet man I told you of with whom Mary had a mild flirtation, explaining that ' he is so like Charlie ' (!). The last night he got rather unlike Charlie, in being so very anxious to seize her plump arm and help her up the steep Arab streets in the moonlight that she had to pull up, morally and physically. Well, our friend arranged a Moorish dance at Fatma's and we went. I had seen and loathe the *Danse du Ventre*, but O the beauty of this woman, and of the whole scene in her exquisite Moorish house, with no vestige of anything European in it ! . . . a great white peacock sitting on a balustrade shimmering in the moonlight of the centre court, the usual immovably grave musicians and three other dancing girls. . . . Oh, it was wonderful ! Our Englishman amused me ; he is stoutish, and when he suddenly plumped down *à la Turque* one admired his courage and his faith in the seams of his garments. He made them sing what Fatma explained were ' chansons d'amour,' but it sounded like cats on the roof and reminded me so of ' The Queen is up there ; can't you here her singing on the leads ? ' But Fatma looked so divinely beautiful that nothing else mattered.

After refreshments had been handed round I asked a musician to lend me his instrument, began fingering it and then to sing. Mary joined in, and then her admirer with his solemn English face and long-suffering seams lifted up a little wee tenor voice and chimed in too. The ditty was quite sentimental—I think ' Drink to me only with thine eyes '—and in the midst of a really supremely ridiculous scene I caught sight of the chief musician's face . . . ! At last some expression on it ! He appeared to be quite enchanted, specially at Mary's high notes, which perceiving, we sang higher and higher, till I began to laugh,

and once one began laughing to stop seemed impossible. But I think they took it as part of the routine of English music-making ; anyhow, they didn't seem at all affronted.

Did I tell you about the little Church at Hammam Rhi'ra ? The Priest comes once a fortnight to say Mass, and to do this he goes down one mountain, wades through a stream, and clambers up another mountain. I found an old Spanish cobbler with a superb voice and made him and Mary join me at Mass in an *a cappella* trio. Getting them started was ' sweating toil ' as I had to give each of them the note. But it went off grandly, and according to the *curé* here (Algiers) they have talked of nothing else ever since.

. . . I wonder if you feel as I do, that when abroad one misses Mother so unspeakably . . . the letters one wrote her . . . the way one used to look around for ' little nonsenses ' to get for her—and, Oh, how she appreciated them, regardless of what they were ! . . . ”

When Hammam Rhi'ra was done with we laid our plans for the fortnight that was yet at our disposal ; first, an expedition by rail and carriage to Ben Ali Cherif's mountain fastness, to be followed by an excursion through some of the most beautiful scenery in Algeria, including the celebrated Setif Pass. Little did we guess what Fate had in store for us !

Ben Ali Cherif, the most beautiful and dignified old man I ever beheld, received us at the gate of his domain and, declaring that no doubt we wished to repair the disorders of the long journey, personally conducted us to the pavilion in the garden where guests are always lodged. The furniture of our huge bedroom was curious ; two magnificent, very Parisian beds, a mirror on the wall, no tables, no chest of drawers, one ewer of water and a basin—both on the floor—and no less than four articles called by Mary's maid ' chambers.' Why four, we could not understand.

After a decent interval we were conducted by two most

gorgeous retainers into the dining hall which was in the main building, but alas ! neither then nor next day were we permitted to pay our respects to the ladies of the harem. The explanation given was that ' ces dames ' were in great distress at the death of one of the children, but we were told afterwards that the wives of terrific grandees like Ben Ali are kept in strictest seclusion, though probably they were peeping at us through loopholes in the sort of triforium that ran round the hall.

Ben Ali's devotion to the Empress was very touching ; I rather fancied he must have been in love with her. We really only conversed on two topics, the Empress and Mohammedanism, which, as expounded by him, an expert and an enthusiast, seemed to me a poor, bald religion, ethically speaking.

The awful part of our visit was two meals—dinner that night and lunch next day. Four other Cherifs were present, but no one except Ben Ali uttered, and by degrees we began to feel our efforts to make conversation were fussy and vulgar in that atmosphere and fell silent. There were at least twenty courses and about six kinds of wine, and it is considered discourteous to refuse any mortal thing. The culminating point was a lamb roast whole which everyone tackled with his fingers. You tore off a bit you liked the look of, and if it was specially delicious you rent it in half and passed it on to your next neighbour. Hay, Mary's maid, who fed in the next room, had to be much urged to take her hands to it. She was abjectly terrified of Arabs, and in her agitating struggle with the carcass the head came off and rolled at her feet. We thought we heard a shriek but no one paid any attention.

The servants had been touchingly well drilled by the Cherif to show us the way to a certain place. Hay went out to ask for some hot water, didn't return for ages, and then came back without it. She had been waylaid by an Arab who, regardless of her remonstrances, conducted her

to that spot. She was too frightened not to go in, and once in was too frightened to come out.

Next morning we departed, laden with messages for the Empress and feeling iller than words can express. Mary had taken the precaution of dosing herself thoroughly, but I, like a fool, refused to follow her example. The result was that on the way, in a ramshackle Victoria, to our next destination, I was seized, quite suddenly, with dysentery, and until our arrival at Algiers three days later (for thither of course we had to hasten in order to be near doctors), I remember little or nothing. The journey was partly by train . . . and what a train ! . . . but chiefly by carriage. Every half-hour or so my semi-conscious form was lifted out of it by Mary and the maid, helped by the driver, and I was soon at the point of not caring two straws whether a cactus bush was, or was not, between me and him. If you are in bad enough pain, good-bye to modesty. I remember that now and again Mary would say, ' Oh, you poor unfortunate Ethel . . . not to be able to see this view ! ' But æsthetic sensibility had gone to join modesty.

Eventually we got back to Algiers somehow, and towards the end of March a letter left the Hotel Continental in which occurred the following passage :

" Do you know the stage of pain when one daren't move, not to even relieve an uneasy position ? O the letters I wrote you in my mind ! If they had been written in reality and found, anyone would have thought them love-letters, whereas they would have been nothing of the sort, but merely letters of love ! And I am sorry to say the other power in my mind, much as I apologise for the company you found yourself in was . . . God ! The fact is when I am driven back into my last entrenchments I always find you and that same other companion ! "

Wait a minute, reader, and see what turn the correspondence with H. B. was to take ! Here I will only say that the aspirations of most men in love are of a far from

divine nature, and given his detestation of the Church, and of course above all of the Church's views on purity, it makes me laugh to-day to picture to myself his disgust at finding himself bracketed with a Being who would infallibly block every approach to the zone my friend was bent on reaching some day ! And to add insult to injury, in this same letter I went on to talk of my misery at being prevented by this illness from taking part in the Easter week ceremonies—condemned to lie in bed and merely listen to church bells. ' Oh ! ' I cried, ' what a Mass I will write some day ! *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi*. . . . What words ! What words ! '

But let a veil be drawn over what must have been H. B.'s exasperation at all this—an exasperation that presently was to be given full vent.

Meanwhile a letter had arrived from the Empress who, knowing that Mary had to be back in England early in April, suggested that as soon as I was fit to travel I should join her at Cap Martin, and stay there as long as I liked, basking in the sun and getting back my strength—an invitation that was accepted with rapture.

It was during the weeks of close companionship that followed that I came to love and admire the Empress with an intensity which suffered no diminution during the twenty-seven years we were to be close neighbours. ' Whatever her faults,' I wrote to my father, ' they are faults of a noble character, and one cannot fancy that even her worst enemies could ever have attributed littleness to her. So temperate, so free from bitterness are her judgments of people, so generous, so big is she in every way, that one feels ashamed of one's own acrimony and harshness.'

I will not affirm that these feelings of mine, absolutely unshakable by time as they proved to be, remained always at the Cap Martin boiling-point ! She herself used to be amusing on this topic ; ' With her,' she would say, ' we are

all in the focus for a certain time ; then one is moved on and someone else becomes the chief figure !' To tell the truth, throughout my life every seven years or so has seen the dawn of a new friendship. Mrs. Benson used to call the first stage the 'My God, what a woman !' stage. This would last about two years and be followed by somewhat moderated transports though the tide was still flowing strongly. Then, in the seventh year, a new star would rise above the horizon, and the cry 'My God, what a woman !' was once more heard in the land. Perhaps the explanation is that, as physiologists maintain, by the end of every seven years every molecule in our body has renewed itself ; consequently we have practically become a new person. If so, what more natural than to need a new friend or perhaps even a new set of friends ? But in no single case I can think of has one who has driven a stake deep into my life ever ceased to be part of it.

The same thing happens as regards individual authors, and indeed whole departments of literature. Dickens, the Elizabethans, the Greeks, Renan, Tolstoi and the Russians, Proust . . . all these have in their turn poured like a flood over the landscape, submerging its usual features ; then the waters subside, leaving the soil all the richer for the inundation.

In the case of new friends the ecstasy of the first impact can never be repeated ; but later on you find that something new and precious has been added to your permanent treasure. Only while, in our passion, we are trying to draw the new friend closer and closer, we should make sure the affair is not too lopsided ; if life has taught me anything at all, it is that. Everyone cannot be asked, perhaps, to emulate one's own seven-league-booted stride, but there must be some chance of eventual equality in the trade balance—if not on the first day, then on the second. As regards the Empress these rules were in abeyance, firstly because she was the Empress, secondly because one felt

instinctively that no new person could aspire to become a necessary part of her life. But she let herself become a necessary part of yours and that did just as well !

And see how rich life is ! At Cap Martin so utterly was I her thrall, that it seemed as if there could be no place in the firmament for another luminary ; yet in twelve months' time the foundations were already laid of my lifelong friendship with Lady Ponsonby ! In fact, one need never get to the end of one's income, bearing on which bold statement I have just come across a charming story told by the late Lord Esher's father. It appears that the then Lord Malmesbury asked his mother-in-law, who was well over eighty, at what age a woman ceases to feel passion ; and the reply was, ' You must ask a woman older than I am, my dear Harris ! '

Lord ! how happy I was at Cap Martin, and in the midst of a long letter to H. B. there was, he said afterwards, one sentence that made him hope the Anglican Church might some day relax its strangle-hold. ' I am so happy,' I wrote, ' that last night I forgot my prayers and don't care a damn ; nor do I care who holds what beliefs *and am going to have my own way in consequence* '—a cryptic utterance that seemed to him an improvement on the mood of renunciation he held in special abhorrence. Yet all this time I was writing a Mass, and innocently inviting him to admire ' the splendid outbursts in the *Gloria* ' and so on, brushing aside his growing distaste and dread of this religious phase as though it were a negligible fly.

One recollection it still almost brings tears into my eyes to think of concerned the Empress and the French fleet. She had always been an impassioned sailor, had never known what sea-sickness is, and even then was negotiating the purchase of her yacht, *The Thistle*, in which in after years I had more than one half-delightful, half-agonising cruise. For I am a bad sailor, but during the ' *My God, what a woman !* ' stage even sea-sickness is taken in one's stride.

That month the French fleet was cruising in those waters and the Admiral, an old and devoted friend of hers, wrote to her of the pain and grief it was to him not to be able—from political reasons of course—to come and visit her. She replied that to her it was an equally great grief, but that if it should be possible to give her a sight of his ten men-of-war it would make her very happy. One morning she came into my bedroom and said she ‘fancied’ that before long they would heave into sight (if that is the correct term). And sure enough a few minutes later ten warships glided past Cap Martin in exquisite formation, came back, and manœuvred this way and that for an hour. ‘Ah!’ I wrote to my brother, ‘you should have heard that poor woman *poussez-ing des cris*; you should have heard the quick-drawn gasps for breath—seen the eyes. It was piteous to watch her watching them. After that we sat and talked for a long time and she showed me much of her mind, and told me what I already knew—that she cannot really care about anything or anybody. She touches me so horribly and then she is so beautiful, and has a sort of grace of mind that surely is in subtle connection with her grace of body. When with her I feel all the time as if I were reading “Antigone” or “King Lear.” Meanwhile her one constant preoccupation seems to be to give pleasure to others, and yet it is doubtless quite true that she doesn’t really feel affection for her beneficiaries. This I think is rather wonderful and rare—to be so fabulously kind on the strength of imagination only. I’m blest if I could—could you?’

I did not treat H. B. to much Empress talk, firstly because I knew he had been brought up to consider this most serious of natures as the last word of frivolity; secondly because I was absolutely in love with God and the Church, and couldn’t help writing pages about that; [for though H. B. detested denominational religion, a more profoundly religious spirit could not be conceived, and I was always

hoping to make my state of mind comprehensible to him] ; and thirdly because I was forging ahead with my Mass and anxious to reach a certain point before we started on a voyage down the Adriatic coast. This wonderful experience has been described elsewhere,¹ so here I will only mention the proud fact that on that voyage I was cast for the improbable rôle of 'demoiselle d'honneur.'

Meanwhile this sporadic correspondence between H. B. and myself, as between two would-be lovers, makes exceedingly funny reading to-day. It consisted on my part of endless ringing of changes on a theme I well knew must be distasteful to him ; and on his of perpetual pourings of cold water on my religious fervour (which he maintained was the result of dysentery and influenza combined) varied by digs at the Empress, which for the time being, I ignored as too preposterous to notice.

This was the sort of thing :

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

" . . . I don't in the least mind your upholding your right to having new *cultes* twelve times a year, since it is always for women, and since you declare that you only like and get on with men when you are ill—which happens, luckily, very rarely. But I confess that when I am in a lopsided and stupid mood you present a magnificent series of stumbling blocks to my gaze, the Leaning Tower of Pisa seen through a prism would be nothing to you—Churches, Empresses (and what Empresses ! the most frivolous of all !), Highland soldiers with bare knees, Tories, Countesses, and cant phrases. . . . I wonder if you know how troublesome it is to be disproportionately intellectual and sensual. And as I am by way of making myself disagreeable, I think you are sometimes disproportionately ambitious ; I don't mean above your abilities, I mean at the cost of your entire self. Is that so ? "

¹ The Empress Eugénie : *Streaks of Life*.

And the letter ends with 'Down with Royalties, Religion, and Renunciation !'

It was good in after years when he came to know and appreciate the Empress as much as even I could desire to preside over his humble-pie meals on the subject.

Meanwhile the ferocity of my reaction to these gibes left nothing to be desired, and on one point I was able to get back some of my own then and there, namely on the ridiculous theme of the beard with which he, who hitherto had been clean shaven but for a moustache, had come back from America. His *chevelure* was one of his very best points ; he knew this and was privately vain of it ; anyhow, complimentary remarks on the subject were always well received. But this beard was, I thought, a horrible beard, long, irregular and rather skimpy ; and, strange to say, he thought well of it, and was hurt at my declaring that neither was it becoming, nor in itself a good beard. One day, after he had made contemptuously jocular references to the Assyrian Church—a remnant of Nestorian Christianity that was still clinging to the mountains round about Urmi and in which I took (and still take) deep interest, I fell back in my indignation and lust for revenge on Lear's 'Nonsense Book.' 'Anyhow,' I wrote, 'you need not fear the fate of the old man with a beard, who said "it is just as I feared ; two owls and a hen, four larks and a wren, have all built their nests in my beard" for in your beard there would not be cover for one grasshopper.' I had been brought up on 'personal-remarks-are-odious' lines, and must have been boiling with rage to have seized such a weapon. For well I knew that Harry, though partial to limericks, would not be at all amused at this one. In fact, greatly as Mrs. Benson disapproved of our correspondence, I think the tone of it, as carried on during that summer, would have reassured her—for the time being, anyhow.

CHAPTER IV

(AUTUMN 1891 TO SPRING 1892)

By the autumn I had finished the Mass and was hard at work on the orchestration, when one of the most interesting events of my life occurred, the occasion upon which I had the honour of playing parts of it to Queen Victoria. Rather than warm up a story told elsewhere,¹ suffice it to say that in the October of that year the Empress, to whom the Queen had as usual lent one of the houses on the Balmoral estate, invited me to stay with her ; that one night at the Castle parts of the Mass were banged out by me before the whole Court, and therewith a step taken that eventually led to the production of the work at the Albert Hall some sixteen months later.

All this time, it being now obvious that my correspondence with H. B. was a settled habit, the friction between myself and Mrs. Benson was increasing, although I was able to report that the breach with Julia was in so far repaired that the whole family was domiciled at Nyon and intended to meet there every summer. It must be remembered that there never was any question of repudiating his past. H. B. was still devoted to his wife and ever mindful of the fact that she was the only one in the story who had lost without corresponding gain. She evidently knew we were writing to each other, and I think there must have been some tacit understanding between them on the subject ;

¹ Two Glimpses of Queen Victoria : *Streaks of Life*.

for now and then he would go off alone into the mountains, having given me a *poste restante* address, and from there he used to write. Never throughout our whole relation did we discuss the precise angle between him and Julia—a loyal reticence on his part I sympathised with and respected. But misty situations were never much to my taste, and when it came to his hinting from time to time that possibly our correspondence might have to cease, I lost patience, and had just declared that either we must meet openly or cut the cable for good, when the kaleidoscope was violently shaken ; the picture dissolved, and settled in a new pattern. As was related elsewhere, in January 1892 both Lisl and her mother died, neither having known that the other was ill. It appeared that for some months Lisl had been ailing but no one had told me so and I took it for granted she was in her usual health. Then one morning came a telegram : ‘ Lisl died yesterday.’

Therewith once more the bottom fell out of my world. But one thing was now certain ; from this hour a new course should be steered. I forthwith wrote a letter to Julia that must have astonished her a good deal, so new was its tone. I told her that for years I had striven to repair as well as I could the harm I had unwittingly done her ; while she on her side had told me that my fate was none of her business. And now, thanks to her implacability, the thing of which I had ever lived in dread had happened—Lisl had died without even sending me a word of farewell. ‘ From henceforth,’ I wrote, ‘ I mean to fashion my life as I choose, not giving you a thought.’

After all, I said to myself, Harry was technically blameless. In spite of the compact on which their extraordinary union had been based, the fact remained that, as wife, Julia had nothing grave to complain of. I knew that in the early days of the catastrophe her mother had urged her to deprive him of intercourse with his children to whom he was much attached, but do not know whether Julia acted

on the suggestion. Anyhow it was abortive, and I suppose even Frau von Stockhausen came to see that it might be unwise to presume too far on the great gentleness of Harry's character. There are points beyond which such natures cannot be driven.

Apparently this letter of mine to which Julia made no reply did its work. There were no more hints from him that 'perhaps' this and 'possibly' that. From henceforth it was I, not she, who shaped the course of our friendship.

This dethronement of Julia, which greatly distressed Mrs. Benson, almost broke the camel-back of our relations. Throughout the past autumn friction had been increasing, chiefly of course about H. B. but also because of the 'smuggle her up the back stairs' lines on which my visits to Lambeth had to be conducted; for it appeared that if the Archbishop merely caught sight of me from afar, let alone encountered me in the house, his work might be wrecked for the day. I had acquiesced in these Guy Fawkes' methods but passionately resented them, and thought them humiliating for us both; and now behold a fresh bone of contention!—in reality a major part of the carcass we had been worrying, each from her own side, for the last two years. Mrs. Benson at last felt the hopelessness of converting me to her point of view; and as there seemed no likelihood of the Archbishop getting over his aversion, we agreed that both visits and correspondence had better be discontinued for the present.

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Ever since Lisl's death I had been sensible of an overmastering longing to see some friends of mine at Munich, who in the past autumn (1891) had had a passing glimpse of the Herzogenbergs, then on their way to San Remo where, on doctor's advice, Lisl was to pass the winter. Through all my great trouble, Mary Fiedler and her husband, a well-known art-philosopher as Germans call that brand

of *savant*, had been wonderful friends to me, refusing to allow that in all that had happened I was more blameworthy than anyone else. In fact, if Baroness von Stockhausen had failed in her amiable intention of destroying me in the eyes of my little German world, it was in large measure thanks to the staunch championship of the Fiedlers. And now, early in February, came a suggestion that I should spend a week or so with them, play the Mass to Levi who was still in high command at Munich, and once more have the bliss of hearing him conduct *Tristan* and the *Missa Solemnis*; after which I could easily go on to Vienna and play my new Opus to Richter.

I now learned from the Fiedlers that Lisl had not appeared to be in an alarming state of health; perhaps a little paler, a little more breathless than formerly, but in great spirits and joking about the doctors having advised this migration. Heinrich had privately begged Mary not to mention my name for fear of agitating her, but Lisl had drawn her aside and demanded news of me. And then she had asked a question to hear of which was a stab; a stab with a strange fierce joy in it. She had asked whether I had got over our separation? And when Mary had answered 'No—nor ever will' poor Lisl had pressed her hand and said under her breath, 'I am glad.'

Next day she was examined by a great heart specialist, after which they proceeded on their journey. But the specialist, an old friend of Conrad Fiedlers, told him that he did not think she would ever leave San Remo. And now she was lying there in the little cemetery I knew so well, and I sleeping in the bed she had slept in only a few weeks ago, petting the big dog that had followed her about, so they said, from the moment she arrived. It was early in February and the year lay stretched out before the happy and unhappy alike. Every day would have to be lived through, and the worst—to realise that the great hope of one's life had gone under—was yet to come.

By this time I had learned that the only cure for sorrow is ceaseless work, and the Munich visit turned out to be something like the happy conjunction of wind and tide that carries a boat over the harbour bar and out into the open sea. Levi, who, as far as he knew my work had not cared for it hitherto any more than he cared for any new music, now heard the Mass and uttered words about it such as Mr. Casaubon, informing Dorothea of the archdeacon's reception of his last learned pamphlet, declared 'it would not become him to repeat!' Not only that, but he found in the Mass evidence of a dramatic gift that made him cry '*You must at once sit down and write an opera.*' (In order to get the matter off the stocks without delay I will say here that I did as I was bid, and for the next eighteen months was busily writing the music for a libretto put together by Harry and me on the basis of de Musset's comedy *Fantasio*.)

Levi also furnished me with a letter to Richter which ensured me and the Mass a hearing, though nothing practical resulted, for, as it appeared, Richter was conducting no choral concerts in London. 'But perhaps elsewhere in England it might be managed?' he added. I, however, had heard a good deal in Germany about the great man's 'peasant astuteness,' and knew that once in England he would realise that I was not in the swim, and then good-bye to his enthusiasm. Had I not watched Joachim, and grasped that foreigners who aspire to a permanent foothold in our music life must abstain from ramming unaccredited indigenous composers down the throats of our concert promoters and selection committees? And certainly the difference between Richter under the guns of a giant like Levi, and the same man consolidating his position, say, at Leeds, was a spectacle to amaze an only half-fledged student of human nature.

While in Vienna I had thought of trying to see Brahms who then was in his flat. In his rough jocular way he had

always been kind and fatherly to me, and the once or twice we had met since the breach with the Herzogenbergs he had gone out of his way to make me feel he was a friend. So I almost sent round a note ; then reflected, ‘ How can we talk of Lisl ? How can we *not* talk of her ? ’ and so the note was torn up. After my return to England, arrived a letter from the Viennese hotel informing me that hardly was I gone than Herr Doctor Brahms had come bustling in, was distressed to find I had left, and begged that the enclosed be forwarded. It was a visiting card I still possess, on which a pencil scribble told me that he had only just heard I had been there and asked why had I not let him know ? I wrote that the breach with Lisl had never been healed . . . that I knew he would understand. And I am sure he did, for his heart was of gold.

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A week or two later another letter from Germany was to exhibit Levi’s readiness to leave no stone unturned in the interests of the Mass ; which matter, strangely enough, brings me in logical sequence to no less a theme than the English Royal Family and what I owe them—partly thanks to the Empress—from the earliest times of my musical struggle to the present day.

The interest which the Empress took in my prospects was partly impersonal. Long before the word was invented she had been a feminist, and during her first Regency had seized the opportunity of installing women at the Post Office, whence no subsequent effort was able to dislodge them. But no doubt there were also personal strands in her countless acts of kindness towards me, the most remarkable of which, her introduction of a young English composer to the Queen’s notice, was, as I have hinted, to have far-reaching results. My friendship and connection, too, with the Davidsons, he being then Dean of Windsor, had led to my coming into contact with two of the Princesses—Princess Louise, who sometimes came to stay at Frimhurst

and was perfectly adorable to my father, and Princess Christian for whom it was impossible, once you knew her, not to entertain as warm feelings as are seemly in the case of Royal Personages ! Again, as subaltern, the Duke of Connaught had served under my father, and he always made a point of showing attention to an old commanding officer's belongings. And later, when His Royal Highness married, and the young couple took up their abode at Bagshot Park, which is only a few miles from Frimhurst, the same gracious tradition was carried on.

I have made it clear that between me and English music yawned an apparently impassable gulf. When therefore Levi put it into my head to try my hand at opera, as there was no fixed institution of the kind in England of course one's thoughts turned to Germany and her hundred Opera Houses, many of which were Court Theatres, presided over and subsidised by royal relations of our own royal house. I had learned my trade in Germany, so the language was to me the same as English. And if later chance after chance was to be given me there of exercising that trade, it was largely owing to the respect and affection of the Queen for the Empress, and the consequent willingness of other members of the Royal Family to do anything in their power to help me. Indeed how could a foreign maiden have made any headway in the land of the three K's (or, if one may venture to translate that sacred formula, the three C's—Church, Children and Cooking) without powerful aid of some sort ?

The thing would happen on this wise. One of the Royal Ladies would write to her august relative, the Grand Duke of So-and-So, explain matters, and ask that I might be put in touch with his Hof Capellmeister. This was all I wanted ; the rest would be my affair. Even so, it was not plain sailing by any means, as anyone who has read the chapter in 'Streaks' called 'A Winter of Storm' may remember. But that was an extreme case—Berlin during

the Boer War when all Germany was down with a particularly poisonous form of Anglophobia. One must also remind the uninitiated that terrific hullabaloes, both on and off the scene, are a normal part of life in German Opera Houses—indeed are looked on as a proof of ‘temperament’ (pronounce in the German manner, throwing the accent on the last syllable) and nobody seems a penny the worse.

Now in the March following my visit to Munich, I was invited, I think for the first time, to spend a couple of nights at Cumberland Lodge, the residence of the Ranger of Windsor Great Park, who was then Prince Christian. The hour for helping my operatic enterprises had not yet struck, but the Princess knew the Mass had been vainly offered to various choral societies, and her first question was ‘Can one *do* anything about it?’ I have told elsewhere of the awful moment at Balmoral, when in my ignorance I was advancing in the direction of the Sacred Hearthrug trodden only by Royalty and specially honoured guests, and how I might actually have set foot on it but for the Princess who saw what was coming and saved the situation in the nick of time. Hence I had knowledge of the kindness of her heart, pondered for a moment, and said that if she would permit Levi to write to her about the Mass, perhaps some use could be made of the letter—for instance in the direction of Barnby, Conductor of the Royal Choral Society, whose President was the Duke of Edinburgh. Eventually Levi wrote to her exactly what he had said to me: ‘I know of no living German composer who could have written that Mass’—a compliment less overwhelming than it sounds when one reflects that Levi looked on Brahms as a back number! This letter Princess Christian sent to Barnby, and thus was laid the first stone of the Albert Hall erection on which I had set my heart.

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Cumberland Lodge was a very pleasant house to stay

in ; no formality, no entertaining of the guests, no expecting them to entertain their hosts. Each one looked after him or herself, went in and out at will, and to crown all I was told I might smoke in my bedroom. Because I transposed a little *Bourrée* for her, the Princess gave me a lovely cigarette case with her initials and coronet on it ; and when I exhibited it at home someone remarked, ‘ If you take that out in a train, they’ll believe you’re a Princess of the Royal Blood.’ But my sister Violet said, ‘ Oh no, she travels third and will probably be taken for a thief.’

In those days I was unaccustomed to such exalted company and no doubt a prey to what the new great friend who was now in the offing (though I knew it not) and who herself was an integral part of the Windsor Castle concept, used to call in withering accents *Royal Culte*. Hence it interested and amused me to find out that in this really devoted royal household, consisting of the Prince, the Princess and their daughter Princess Tora as she was called, domestic scenes were to be witnessed that bore a striking resemblance to what no doubt goes on in any Windsor villa you please.

This sort of thing. Years ago, out shooting, a pellet glanced off a tree, and the result was that Prince Christian wore a glass eye. And the one subject which provoked and almost reduced Princess Christian to tears—a subject she was for ever entreating her husband not to drag into the conversation—was glass eyes. This being so, if anything went wrong at dinner, the cooking perhaps or the service, you would hear the Prince’s voice, trebly charged with German accent, remarking at the far end of the table that even a man with *two* glass eyes could see at a glance that the birds were overdone or the claret cloudy. Never did he fail to get the desired rise, and I confess it amused me more there than the same scene might have done at Laburnum Villa, Park Road.

Many little surprises await one who for the first time is

admitted to the intimacy of a royal establishment. I remember how astonished I was when Princess Christian remarked one day : ' If people who are frightened of us only knew how much more frightened we are of them, they'd be sorry for us.' And although the terrific training to which they are subjected enables them to conceal such weaknesses from the public, sometimes the disease seems incurable. I knew of one royal sufferer at a German Court in whom it took the form of leg paralysis. Obvious though it might be that some gracious visit had lasted long enough, she was unable to get up and go. I remember, too, the face of one of the initiated, a hard-boiled lady-in-waiting, when she overheard the visited one, a doctor's wife, stating with pride that the dear Grand Duchess had dropped in and actually stayed three and a half hours !

Now if this little scene had played at Norman Tower, Windsor Castle, abode of my incipient new friend, I can imagine the sarcastic comments that would have rained, once the door had closed on that innocent. And one can well understand the exasperation of rather *blasé* courtiers at the ecstasies of outsiders over graciousness which they take for a tribute to their own charms, instead of the much finer thing it is—an outcome of admirable *manège*. All the same, when Lady Ponsonby used to scoff at what she called my *Royal Culte*, I would counter by maintaining that in my opinion, however repulsive snobbishness in its grosser manifestations may be, it is of its essence imaginativeness shot through with a strain of religiosity ; the emotion of a race that is naturally reverent. A race, too, that instinctively brushes aside all that nonsense about people being equal ; that knows they never were and never will be equal ; that in such inequalities as may be studied even in the animal kingdom, nature does one half and luck the other. A race, in short, that is sensible, fanciful and humorous enough to insist on possessing a glittering symbol of all this, enshrines it turn about at Windsor, Buckingham

Palace, Balmoral, and Sandringham, and enjoys watching it play its difficult part with courage and skill.

Does the public realise, I wonder, what an effort is necessary to being always, apparently, at the top of one's form? Yet such is the task of Royalty, and once, not so long ago, this was brought home to me by a little scene I shall never forget.

Just before the B.B.C. came into power the 'Proms' were at the last gasp, and someone said that only one thing could save them—the appearance, just at one concert, of the King and Queen. On enquiry I learned that the only week in which it might have been a physical possibility was stiff with royal commitments. However, after renewed representations as to the really *popular* nature of the 'Proms,' etc., etc., not only was the Royal Presence achieved, but as a dying fire is saved by poking in paper and sticks at the right moment, so the 'Proms' were saved by royal sense of duty—for it would seem that attending classical concerts was not among H.M. King George's favourite relaxations!

Now a Buckingham Palace Garden Party was imminent, and as an effort to express the gratitude of the Directors (and also an intimation of the success of the royal visit) seemed called for, a friend who knew the ropes suggested my taking up my station at such and such a place, just before the Royal Party went into the tea tent. As I had the honour of being known to the Queen, the desired end could then be attained quite easily.

Will it be believed that arrived at the Palace it dawned on me that I had *left my card of invitation in the country* . . . ! Eventually a nightmare of effort achieved what every card warns the recipient is an absolute impossibility—entrance without it; but by that time the Royal Party were already in the tea tent! In the words recently used by one of our statesmen 'I had missed the bus'!

In despair I sped to the back of the tent and persuaded one of the Palace policemen to take in a scribbled S.O.S.

to Lord Cromer, who came out and told me the Sovereigns were having an unusually arduous day, I know not how many colonial ministers, divines, and their wives having yet to be introduced. But perhaps in an hour's time, all would be well, if . . . and here he gave me directions.

I did as I was advised and took firm root by a certain lonely post. Presently a space was roped off, also a gangway leading from it to the Palace, and in no time guests were surging round me with such determination that it needed an effort to hold what was evidently a coign of vantage.

And now the Royal Party moved slowly across the cleared space, heading for the gangway, the Queen, with one of the Princesses, a little ahead. I then saw Lord Cromer slip round and say a few words to her. . . . O the look of dismay, almost of despair, on that white, tired face ! 'What ! *another* of them !!' you guessed she was either saying or thinking. But by the time the gangway was reached the face wore its usual expression of friendly serenity, and anything more gracious than her reception of my rapidly conveyed message cannot be conceived. 'O but we were so *glad* to come,' she said, 'it is a wonderful sight and you must tell everyone how impressed we were and how happy to know it did some good.'

And on passed the gracious, gallant lady, I hope to do what we commoners would have done—get into a dressing-gown, lie down on an extra-comfortable sofa, and read an extra-unexacting book (for I am told Her Majesty is a great reader). I thought I had realised long since how compact Royal lives are of effort, but that little scene drove it home to me with a pang of sympathy and admiration I feel afresh whenever memory recalls it.

Royalties are in themselves a most arresting study, and what puzzles me is, that either because familiarity blunts perception, or from dread of being thought snobbish or silly or God knows what, no intelligent member of the inner circle has bruited abroad the thrilling fact that

Royal Personages are of a different *genus* to you or me. Nature may have fashioned them as direct, as normally human as ordinary beings ; but as time goes on one and all show signs of having been inoculated with some mysterious fluid, lacking which element in their blood the part allotted to them cannot be put through adequately. So at least one gathers, for as far as my limited experience goes in this respect they are all alike. I expect they are obliged, like so many august tortoises, to grow a sort of polished protective shell that will turn the point of indiscreetly probing weapons. All of which I find at least as enthralling as the peculiarities of dons, sailors, huntsmen, Fabians, cats, clergymen, old maids, vegetarians or any other group.

As for those who care about heredity, who even, like the present writer, have been accused of preferring hereditary vices to freak virtues, it is good to think our Royal Family have such splendid material to work on ; a nation, that is, consisting of practical, matter-of-fact persons with an unlimited power of dreaming ; the combination that, whipped up to the *n*th degree, ends in a Shakespeare !

And now, as conclusion to this pæan in honour of *Royal Culte*, may I offer the reader a refresher, a whiff of smelling salts as it were, in the shape of a remark overheard by my neighbour and great friend Lady Betty Balfour as she was then, and passed on to me with gusto that very night. She had been at a concert where some things of mine were played, and one of two girls seated in front of her said to the other : ‘ I like her music but I’ve never met her. An awful snob, isn’t she ? ’ ‘ Oh, terrific, I believe,’ replied the friend.

CHAPTER V

(SPRING AND SUMMER 1892)

BEFORE the iron curtain went down between me and Mrs. Benson, I and her eldest son Arthur, then a house-master at Eton, had met at Addington, and at once taken a fancy to each other. And now, distressed at the deadlock, he intervened and tried to straighten out matters between his mother and me. As will be seen later,¹ he too came to the conclusion that for the time being there was nothing to be done, but his kindly intervention was all to the good.

In May Harry came over to England, and whether or no because of my stern letter to Julia, our relations became the quiet, never provocatively flaunted alliance we had always aimed at as blameless minimum that ought to be conceded. We rode about Swinley Forest and Bramshill Park, and met privately in London, where he would take a room at one hotel for me and another at some other hotel for himself. And a week later we did the same thing at Paris, whither I was obliged to go for a few days about some nebulous musical scheme with Colonne that came to nothing ; after which Harry introduced me to the *Chat Noir*, of which I have far more precise recollections than of the interview with Colonne.

Anyone who should have known how, when, and where we met, would doubtless have concluded we were lovers ; and if Julia knew anything about it, probably she held that belief. There is a story by Anatole France which

¹ See his letter, p. 70.

begins with a paragraph about the Senator and the Marquise who for years had been in the habit of meeting daily. 'Le monde selon son habitude soupçonna le pire. *C'était exacte.*' But in our case 'le monde' would have been wrong. From the very first our relation had followed lines of its own. And just as I had understood four or five years ago when he paid no attention to my S.O.S., so he understood that this time it was I whose 'No' could not be circumvented, that people must move forward on their own lines and at their own pace. And inasmuch as he now perceived that religion, as I understood it at least, was building no wall between us, and that it was merely a case of waiting till a certain inward process had worked itself out in the soul of your friend, he was willing to wait.

Occasionally he grumbled. 'This morning,' he wrote, 'I have been laughing over the recollection of a passage in Bouillet's Biographical Dictionary, where, speaking of the Virgin Mary, he says, "*elle épousa S. Joseph, qui fût plutôt le gardien de sa virginité que son époux*" . . . But we will keep off that subject. Wait a minute. I have been feeling for my halo.' And there is a reference to our meetings which he allows deepen our friendship in spite of limitations. 'Our worst quarrel,' he reminds me, 'was at a distance.' (I think he must have meant the one in which the Assyrian Church and his beard—now clipped to a very becoming pointed shape—got so unfortunately mixed up) and he adds: 'It is darkness that stops quarrelling. We did not quarrel at the *Chat Noir*, did we? Well then! meditate on that . . . *but not too much.*'

And yet, 'for a' that and a' that,' we were not lovers.

This letter was from Aix, whither he had gone after Paris to meet my sister, Mary Hunter. They made friends at once. He said they had executed a charming duet on the subject of myself, strophe and antistrophe, but would tell me nothing further; for one of the many little traits of austerity that surprised you in a character so easy-going

was, that you never could get him to pass on a compliment direct. He let you infer this or that, and you had to make it do.

I should begin by saying that by nature Mary was imperious, and disliked being kept waiting as much I do—and that is saying a good deal—whereas Harry was one of the calmest, most patient of men, and apt to be reproached by me for not hurrying up waiters at restaurants and generally asserting himself enough. ‘But those people came in before us,’ he would remark, ‘and ought to be served first,’ and I would reply, ‘I can’t help that, I want my cutlet *quick*.’ Sometimes he would make a valiant effort to conform to my ideal. I remember our coming in late at some theatre, and a rude man, refusing to shift his legs, whispered fiercely, ‘Why can’t you come in time, damn you?’ Whereupon Harry replied, ‘Because the road was up—damn *you*!’ But his manner was so exquisitely polite that the rude one’s lady companion laughed out loud and the row in front said ‘Hush!’

But though imperious, the lovely Mary was emphatically a man’s woman, and held all her sex in dire contempt except herself and me. And it must be mentioned that her great friend Sir William Eden, who was also at Aix, was notorious for rudeness to people who displeased him, and a general tendency to do what the Empress, who never got her English idioms quite right, used to call ‘pick up a quarrel.’

Given all this, the following passage in Harry’s letter from Aix amused me greatly.

“Your sister hates having the waiters stormed at, and the other day told her host at the restaurant, Sir William Eden, that she would rather eat any mess at her lodgings than hear him talk like that to the servants. What do you say to that? It is such a victory for me that I feel almost mean in telling you of it. I told her you said she would go mad if I took her to dine on account of my apathy and meekness,

and she declared that on the contrary that was just what he liked. Are these feminine wiles unconsciously evolved in the spur of the moment, or don't you know your own sister? Anyhow, I exult."

No doubt feminine wiles had something to do with it, but dear Sir William's methods when things went wrong would turn anyone into patience on a monument. Also, sort of rudeness to servants, which I think was as impossible to me as to H. B., there is such a thing as insisting on being quickly served. But that was an art my philosophic friend did not possess.

The letter further said 'We then talked about religion like two old men of the world, after which I wrote down the names of some improper books for her, recommending they should be left on this side of the Channel.' And so off with him to Nyon to join his family.

That summer I had a blessedly peaceful time of hard annis and hard work on *Fantasio*. My father was an ideal man to live with, cheery, sociable, immensely popular, always busy, interested in everything from debates in the louses of Parliament to village scandals—with which utter he dealt, as magistrate, with a perfect blend of high moral principle and indulgent knowledge of human nature. Deeply though he had loved my mother, the relief from pityingly, helplessly watching her sad march towards old age must have been greater than he allowed himself to realise, and I wrote to my brother: 'Papa is gloriously well, *unberufen*; he has the pair out every day; no garden party is too remote for him, and the doctor hasn't been in the house this year!'

Not only was there external peace. As I wrote to Harry, Had ever woman such a friend as I have in you? Often when I think of you the tears almost come into my eyes. In some ways I enjoy being away from you more than with

you—no conflict, no fighting ; just quiet knowing and feeling.’

Then, too, Pauline Trevelyan—the friend whom when he came to know her he was more drawn to than any of my friends—stayed at Frimhurst as often as she could, and was thrilled by what I could show her of *Fantasio*. She was one of the most exquisite personalities that can ever have been lent to this world—and one always felt it would not be for long. Servant of two passions, religion and music, though it had grieved her when I decided to resume intercourse with H. B., the fact was never a cause of friction between us. At one time, when my relations with the Archbishop were comparatively easy, she had spent a night at Addington, and even he was at her feet in two minutes, while Mrs. Benson had remarked : ‘ If *she* doesn’t make a Roman of you, no one will ! ’

But though her gentle penetrative influence got into my bones as no one else’s ever has except Harry’s, she never made the slightest attempt to convert me ; no—not even going as far as a witty Frenchwoman, one of the guests at Farnborough Hill, who remarked that since I was so taken up with religion she wondered I did not prefer the Roman Catholic Church to ‘ l’Église Catholique, Apostolique Anna Boleyn.’ Even as Pauline accepted my alliance with Harry, so she accepted my religion ; and that is my idea of friendship.

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All this time, indeed ever since I finished it, which must have been in the summer of 1891, I had been vainly trying to interest some conductor in the Mass. For unless there were some definite prospect of a performance no publisher would print the vocal score, and unless the vocal score were printed the work could not be performed ! After Levi’s strong letter, Sir Joseph Barnby had reconsidered a previous refusal, reminding me that he had been ‘ very much struck ’ by the work, but had explained to me that novelties by

unknown composers spell financial disaster. However, he would now discuss the matter with his committee.

I then approached Messrs. Novello, who said that if the work were performed and if the Queen would attend the concert they would publish for me. I replied that the Queen was unthinkable, but that perhaps the Empress Eugénie would come. That, said Messrs. Novello, would be excellent, but failing the Queen I must pay half the expenses of printing.

Thereupon the Empress gave me a cheque for £100 and said that though she had been to no public function since 'les évènements' (as they always called the downfall of the Empire) she would attend the performance provided it were immediately after Christmas, as the villa she was building at Cap Martin demanded her presence. All this was passed on to Barnby and his committee, who hummed and hawed and finally said it could not possibly be till April! Deadlock! Well might I write to Harry: 'How queer it seems that so simple a thing as the performing by a great and rich Choral Society of a work the merits of which no one questions should be so un-simple!'

It makes me laugh to-day, though no longer with bitterness, to think of the word 'simple' being used in such a connexion, for these were merely the obvious, the decorative difficulties one had to contend with. More heart-breaking still were the sordid cares of an indigent composer in the hands of the copyists of those days, who could thus be classed: (a) honest, inaccurate, and slow-coaches; (b) capable, unreliable, and drunkards. This particular department of the existence led by composers in the early part of their career I shall not refer to again. It is worse than poking about in a dust heap beneath whose unsavoury deposits no hidden jewel can possibly lie concealed. There is nothing similar in other professions, and until the wretched composer gets famous and his publishers see to all that part, these clerical difficulties darken his days.

But that is no reason why they should darken the days of those who fifty years later read his memoirs.

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The future being thus enveloped in mist, it was with rather a troubled heart that I prepared to visit Bayreuth for the first time in my life with Barbara Laycock, a delightful moneyed maiden, friend of Mary's, who had nobly offered to make me a present of the trip.

To talk at length about an occasion like this is rather as though one were to recall one's emotions a few decades ago when aeroplanes were in their infancy and some greatly daring friend took you up for a joy-ride. Yet the parallel is not exact, for whereas to-day flying can show a record that doubtless surpasses the Wrights' wildest dreams, time will not go backwards to please anybody, and never again can one re-create Bayreuth as it was before the inevitable happened and it became, however carefully the performances are prepared, a commercialised summer excursion. One tremendous difference between then and now is, that in 1892 many were yet alive who had known Wagner, and had watched the gradual erection of the Festspielhaus much as the Jews in Nehemiah's day watched the uprising of their Temple from its ashes. And these were now to be seen, strolling about the grounds between the Acts—these very first followers of the Master—raging, rebellious, not particularly cherished by Cosima, their passion interpenetrating the air as passion always does.

Even so, to read my own letters about that experience has astonished me a little, for I never was, nor am I now, a Wagnerite in the extreme sense of the word. Other art has given me what I cannot but rate as a higher quality of rapture—Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Schubert and others. I even remember a few years later, when for the first time I saw Paestum, standing in the centre of the Neptune Temple and suddenly being possessed with such an overwhelming horror of Wagner's art as compared to this,

that it seemed as though one were physically seized and shaken by one of the ancient gods. I expect it was so—that the Representative Deity of the Glory that was Greece had one in his grip. All the same, I can only affirm, Pilate-like, that what I felt in 1892 at Bayreuth I did feel.

For these reasons I shall now quote my letters to Harry, first abasing myself in the dust before the *manes* of those I refer to in one of them as ‘ridiculous,’ and who in 1892 had either slunk into their kennels, intimidated by the Royal Visitors and the Smart Set of all countries, or else had been weeded out by death.

The circumstances of this jaunt were very pleasant, and an extra human touch was lent by the turning up of a very delightful young man, Ned Mitchell Innes, who was courting Barbara. After my return to England I wrote thus about them to Harry :

“She is not in love with him so far, but she likes men, and differs from me in feeling no repulsion when they love her unrequitedly. Consequently she was content, after we had supped in a wood, to sit with her back against a tree, while he lay at her feet gazing silently at the sky. Then would I rise from my place, avoiding too great appearance of design, and move out in thin shoes into the moonlit open glade where the dew lay thick and where I was out of mind and out of earshot. Consequently I have come back from Bayreuth with a very bad cold—the price of my delicacy and humanity—and Barbara afterwards remarked she found me very different from what she expected, the reverse of hard and sarcastic (!) I like love going on about me, though it makes me sad and envious in a way. But then I brace myself, and say ‘You can’t have everything’; and remembering certain words about ‘in der Beschränkung zeigt sich der Meister’¹ go on to the next thing. Nevertheless I all but sent you a wire imploring you to come although I know you dislike Wagner. But then you have no conception of what Bayreuth is. It paralyses everything in

¹ ‘Working under limitations is the test of mastership.’

you but the power of drinking in and assimilating the wonders you see and hear. I could do nothing else—not even read.”

To which Harry replied :

August 14, 1892.

“Do you really think I should like Bayreuth? I have always been afraid of going there on account of the earnestness. I am afraid I shall never get over the schoolboy flippancy that makes me long for ginger beer and fulminating peas in church. My earnestness has to come on me unawares and do me violence. If I see her coming beforehand I grin from ear to ear like an idiot and she can do nothing.

The voluntary surrender is so difficult in everything. I suppose if one can bring oneself to it Bayreuth is impressive. But the terrible question is would not anything be impressive, Racine, and Hegel, and the Salvation Army, if one voluntarily surrendered one's sense of humour and one's critical spirit? With persons it is another thing; they are not so terribly earnest; they too are critical and humorous, and they blame and chaff and anathematise you, and you them, and enough remains to knock you off your feet every now and then like a beautiful wave. Isn't it so? . . .”

But I could not stop trying to make him feel the spell of the place, and taking up an undaunted pen, started again :

August 16, 1892.

“ . . . But I do assure you there is absolutely nothing at Bayreuth to make you laugh. The days of the far-seeing ridiculous old Wagnerians are past, for all the world is Wagnerian now, and Bayreuth is a world's fair. This is as it should be, for Wagner wanted the outcasts, that is the fashionable frivolous, as much as Christ wanted his rather different outcasts (by the way, two of the few people whom Christ is specially mentioned as having loved were evidently of the Upper Ten—rich, prosperous, and no doubt sniffed at by His fishermen followers).

Of course, it will not always be so, but just now the

place is at its perfection, in that Frau Wagner is there to keep everything up to his ideal. Yet what is above all impressive is the spirit of the audience ; and this is not owing to any concentrated effort of ' earnestness,' which I too had always dreaded, but to the fact that the hurry and bustle of life is inaudible at Bayreuth. People have stepped outside the circle of their usual cares and influences—which of course happens also at Waters ; but there's not enough gravitation about drinking sulphurous liquids at stated hours to keep these frivolous planets in any sort of orbit. Now at Bayreuth the purposeless ones get a purpose, for Wagner appeals even to them.

And then it is all so marvellously simple—the life in all sorts of queer little burgher dwellings, the meals out of doors (and very, very bad they are). I can't imagine how anybody can be otherwise than ' happy and good ' there ! . . .

No—you would love Bayreuth and I was sorely tempted to send that telegram ; for one reason because I should have liked to have had a fellow creature catching that very same cold I caught in the wood. But if you had come it would not perhaps have been cold that I should have caught."

All this eloquence was wasted. Harry remained unkindled and declared the only things he regretted were ' the nasty little out-door dinners, and of course the wood ' ; so I will only add that Barbara and Ned Mitchell Innes married and that a happier couple never existed. Whence may be contended that however poor a fist one made of it as Wagner propagandist, as gooseberry a success was scored.

A curious thing is that I can't remember whether I visited Villa Wahnfried (the Wagner's house) in the flesh or only in the illustrated papers. Eleven years later, when I had the honour of meeting Frau Cosima in Berlin, she said, ' Oh, I remember you perfectly at Wahnfried.' But this meeting was at the Chancellor's palace and she would naturally conjure up gracious recollections of one presented

to her by Madame de Bülow and her mother, the great Donna Laura Minghetti.

I also remember her saying on that occasion that 'the premature death of Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, one of the glories and graces of Germany, had caused her heart to bleed,' which somewhat surprised me, for I knew from two Wahnfried satellites that Frau Wagner was never more 'magnificent' than when denouncing the Herzogenbergs and all that anti-Wagner group. But Madame de Bülow was listening—and Madame de Bülow had adored Lisl !

Mary Fiedler, warm-hearted, impulsive, decorative, the pursued of all painters, a great friend of Levi's and *enormously* rich (which was always a great recommendation at Wahnfried) had of later years become an intimate of Frau Wagner's and used to tell me a good deal about the family ; and the more I heard, the less I liked the sound of them. It was from her I learned that when, on Wagner's death, Brahms had sent a wreath, Cosima's comment was, 'I understand the man was no friend to Our Art, so why should this wreath be acknowledged?' It was not acknowledged, or even mentioned in the papers as having been sent. Brahms was wounded to the quick, and Mary's sole remark to me was, 'It was a great mistake to have sent it at all.'

On the whole I think it unlikely that I signed the gigantic Visitors' Book, which formality ensured the automatic arrival of a card presenting you with the freedom of the house. To enter, as non-worshipper, places where divine worship is going on is neither decent nor pleasant.

LETTER SECTION I

(EASTER TO AUGUST 1892)

(A)

CONCERNING THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN E. S. AND MRS. BENSON

[*Mrs. Benson having been such an important factor in my life, I had intended to give some of her letters, and some of my replies in this section. If I decided otherwise it is because the real part of our friendship, the time when but for that I could not have staved off despair, belongs (and will be found) in 'Impressions,' whereas this book is really the story of my renewed intercourse with Harry Brewster. And from that moment she and I were at variance.*

In Father Martindale's 'Life of Monsignor Benson' are wonderful letters from his mother, written when her youngest son went over to Rome. No record could show more strikingly to what heights love, wisdom, and sympathy can rise in a soul like hers when Fate demands the uttermost farthing. But in the comparatively small matter of her dealings with me, once the first-aid stage was past I do not think that great practitioner was at her best.

Nor was I. In my letters is a note of exasperation that mars and distorts the very manifest affection behind it, while in hers I find no great display of either understanding or loving-kindness. And over them, invisible but felt, hovers the tiresome spectre of the seventh Commandment.

Early in 1892 we decided, as I said, to try a spell of silence, and then it was that her eldest son Arthur most kindly intervened

and endeavoured to aerate the differences between his mother and myself. A little later in the same year he and Harry met.]

(B)

LETTERS FROM ARTHUR C. BENSON TO E. S.

Sligachan Hotel, Portree, Skye.

Easter Tuesday, 1892.

. . . Cannot you look on the 'condemnatory' attitude as but one more of the limitations that surround my people—and which I think I see now more clearly than I saw before. Cannot you say to yourself 'they criticise my attitude to nature and religion, *as they would define them*—and our definitions are not the same'? I do not think it is ever hard to forgive criticism so long as it is frank and not intended to give pain. When Edward Lyttelton sent me the other day a list of a hundred and forty-five mistakes in language, metaphor, and expression in my Memoir to the *Sunday Times*, I was amused and gratified; amused because I saw he did not understand that he had proved the very point he had attempted to disprove—that the style was 'conversational' without which no memoir is worth anything; and gratified that he should know me well enough to know I should be grateful to him. There were only eight points where I agreed. That is an illustration. From your point of view you can overlook these strictures and give them credit for such largeness as they possess outside of their limits. I do not think these limitations so close as you do; I was present at a brief interview between my mother and Mrs. Harrison (Lucas Malet) the other day, after which I found myself thinking that if ever anyone had risen superior to the degrading temptations to character given by an official sort of prestige, it was my mother. If you could once or twice meet some of the bishops' wives that are to be found at home—the arrogance, the conceited contentment with a narrow horizon—the paltry consciousness of influence!

But perhaps quiescence at present is best. I should feel that my intervention had been unwarranted (and the more

so as it has been, apart from my *feeling* in the matter, a very interesting psychological problem) if I did not think I had perhaps prevented the misunderstanding from becoming chronic. May I also say that it is very delightful and encouraging to one in my position—a professional restrainer—to see a vigorous vitality expanding itself in regions which one is tempted to think from week to week have no existence except in the imagination of romancists, so little does a life of business give glimpses into them. It is like climbing in these hills, where you scramble for hours among shattered ridges and heaps of stone, and suddenly through a gap see lake and promontory and creeks and distant hills. . . .

Remember that anything that I can do, any interpretation that I can lend, will be not a service that I am ready to do, but a pristine pleasure in the doing, because I think the more that the moral and artistic circles touch—and to-day they are drawing farther and farther away all over the world—the better for us all.

Ever sincerely yours,

ARTHUR BENSON.

Arolla.

August 9, 1892.

DEAR MISS SMYTH,—I was very sorry not to have the chance of seeing you at Eton : but I was gone before your letter came and it followed me finally here.

I must also confess that it gave me a little feeling of disappointment : of course other people will want to be your friend wherever you go, and no doubt a narrow-minded ecclesiastical family are very tame by comparison. But if the give-and-take is to be natural, you must take them as *they* are : in certain matters they have an instinct (I do not say true necessarily) absolutely ingrained, which makes one view of life impossible to them ; womanliness has its defects no doubt but this sensitiveness is rather among its finest qualities.

They have an unfortunate sense of an ideal, to which they try not only to conform *themselves*, but to draw their friends thither ; and it was I believe in virtue of thinking

that you were moving the same way that their friendship with you began.

But these two points—sensitiveness about certain things I needn't particularise, and idealising—are absolutely half their nature, or more, and if you accept them, you must accept their tendencies. You complain of their wanting to alter you, and yet you want to alter them.¹

Alas ! the thing is very difficult : well, in the Pilgrim's Progress all the people couldn't walk together, though they could smile when they met.

Of course what makes you so particularly attractive to people is that you are so little typical, so unconventional : because you are yourself and not modelled uneasily on anyone.

But my people are sincere too ; I do not think them conventional or typical : but they have a good deal of the *Puritan* feeling about them, which is easily mistaken for it.

I think the thing best let alone, at present : my mother is not happy about it I know : she is puzzled and distressed : but I do not think she will change her attitude—and indeed it would not be natural : I think you had better give them up altogether for a while, and see if you miss them out of your life.

It is a selfish thing to say, but I shall always be glad of one thing—that these difficulties have made us, I hope, friends.

Ever sincerely yours,
ARTHUR BENSON.

[I had asked him to tell me what his impressions of H. B. had been.]

Eton College, Windsor.
Summer, 1892.

DEAR MISS SMYTH,—The thermometer being at 83 confines me to the house ; or else I should be endeavouring to aerate my stagnant brain. I fear you will get the benefit of the stagnant thoughts after all ; for your letter tempts

¹ I wrote to tell him I did not want to alter them, but only to stop their endeavours to alter me.

me to try and write an appreciation—always a particularly delightful thing when you have met a person once under stimulating circumstances, and have next to no sidelights, except that my mother broods and broods over his books.

Well, you must know it was a very literary party—Pater and Hardy and Gosse and Maartens and Austin Dobson, and many others ; some borrowed names, and some who like myself had written a book of which no one else could see the point.

And—I am not being insincere, because I have said this several times already—the most agreeable and delightful person there was Mr. B. I must except Gosse perhaps (tho' he was rather cumbered like Martha with much flurry and shuffling a party of hot guests who had lunched well)—for he, Gosse, has a most singular knack, to me at least, of fascinating talk. But I suppose all the others were saving their epigrams for their books and trying to get hold of other people's good things, whereas Mr. B., not writing for bread, could afford to be generous.

His looks interested me : in the first place he was what I call a fine gentleman in the best sense—and except Lord de Tabley, and dear Gosse again, the others had not the happy flexibility of good breeding. It is a curious face. He looks as if he had seen and hoped and thought much, and was a little weary of things in general—of the stupidities and banalities at all events : he came and sat next to me and I had an indefinable wish of wanting to interest him which is a hopeful sign I think. We talked about many things, his books, and I told him frankly—was he vexed?—that I was not, I thought, interested in philosophy as a subject at all, but that I recognised the charm of his writing ; in fact his books are almost the only ones I have lately seen that I can read on such subjects. He talked about my book, and of course we talked about you : I said frankly again what I have said to you, that I do not know anyone whose personality is so potent, whom I would rather see in a room that I entered than yourself, and I think to be candid we went on talking about you till he went away : and I recognised with sorrow that here was another of the

persons going up and down the world that I should have wished to see more of, and to find out what he thought and what he had gathered and unlearned, but that time and space would probably effectually bar the wish. . . .

I suppose him to have a very subtle and analytical mind ; and to have much virility and independence, clothed upon, as I like to see, strength, with a delicate exterior both of form and manner.

I was not quite so bold as to say to him, like a young American who lunched with me the other day, and looked me full in the face with large eyes and said that I would excuse him asking, but what was my object in life ? I was forced in self-defence to ask whether he meant with a large or a small O. But I should like to know what Mr. B.'s object and Objects are—what he believes in, what he wants, and what he thinks will be the end of it all. There was a certain negative air about him. I do not suppose he has any illusions, but I should like to know whether anything has taken their place. . . . Seeing him was like peeping into a pleasant room and then having the door shut in your face. Because I did honestly like him very much. . . .

Ever sincerely yours,

ARTHUR BENSON.

(C)

*CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN H. BREWSTER AND
E. S.¹*

Dresden.

December 14, 1891.

. . . Frau von Stockhausen is better, but getting near the end of her lease. I have forgiven her long ago, as one forgives people who have never in their life known what they were doing or where they were going but who glitter like beautiful fishes. I am acting very dutifully by her, taking her down to Florence, etc. We are on the best of terms and she is persuaded I am the devil ; tells everybody so. . . .

¹ The first two of the following letters appeared in *Impressions that Remained*.

Thank you for your letter.¹ Believe me it is not the author but the friend who is pleased though he only comes in under cover of the other. I find (don't you ?) that after the first fortnight or so an author doesn't much care about his work, *quâ* author. It is cut off from his flesh and has gone forth on its own account. 'Dieu te mène à ton adresse !' said Musset. . . .

[*About Lisl and her death.*]

Rome.

February 8, 1892.

. . . I am glad to hear you speak of Lisl as you go. Very glad. With your Celtic exuberance of expression you once spoke, or rather wrote, about her in a way that grieved me and shut me up on that subject, though I hoped, as it has turned out, that sometimes you felt otherwise. It was about having wasted your time and your treasures on her. No, you certainly did not waste your time, as your sorrow for her now proves. You really did love her, and that in itself is enough. Perhaps she returned less than you gave ; if so the loss was chiefly hers ; but *as far as I know* I don't think the word traitor applies to her. It may be that I have not all the facts (you speak sometimes as though I had not) but I doubt if you have them either or have ever quite realised the cruel position she was in. Yes, we were on quite friendly terms, she and I : never intimate of course—firstly because there was a big silence between us about you and the Hildebrands,² and then because of something so German about her that all my Latin colours glowed at once with redoubled fury as soon as we met. But she had a wonderful grace of moods which I could not look at without admiration, and I suppose she had the penetration of her sex in finding this out, and so liked me well enough, as an unclassable curiosity of a brother-in-law. Julia was fond of her in the usual proper, sisterly fashion but nothing out of the way, whereas she worshipped her

¹ I had been angry with him, but had got over my anger re-reading *The Prison*.

² The couple who had done so much mischief seven years previously.

mother, to whose shortcomings her eyes were lovingly blind ; and the minor loss has been swamped in the greater one. Love is good, no matter whom it goes to ; and if perchance to one's mother, who would protest or breathe a word ?

I am glad you grieve over Lisl, because a great affection ending in total indifference is inexpressibly sad to me. Why go on with one's self, with the same body and the same name, why not blow one's brains out and make a fresh start if such things can be forgotten ? Times may change and trouble may come, even strife and separation ; but something must surely remain as long as those who have loved one another remain alive—respect for the feelings they wrought together, and gratitude therefore to one another. You cannot at all be sure, I should fancy, that because Lisl turned away from you and held aloof, or was hard or unjust on some point or other, she had forgotten. I imagine not. She was too musical to forget, and her eyes were too deep and pure. The strife and separation were necessities of the foreground, one of the tragedies we are called on to play without knowing why. I wish you could have been sure of this, and, as you say, have joined hands for a minute ; but unless you have very strong proof to the contrary—something of which I am quite ignorant—judge her by yourself, and what she felt by what you feel.

I have not spoken to you yet about the Mass and Levi's verdict. . . . You happy, clever one to have made yourself intelligible ! I envy you, with affectionate pride and joy. I never shall have that luck, or skill . . . or goodness ? Perhaps it is goodness, warmth of feeling for others, that makes one clear to them. If it were not for the thought that perhaps it is goodness that does it, I would go to sleep comfortably in my obscurity. You see we have two rôles in the world ; one as human beings, and the other as cosmic atoms, grains of dust filtering eternally through space. As human being I don't seem to have got on very far somehow, but as cosmic atom *je suis très réussi*, I assure you ! Of course the question may arise : ' Was kann ich

mir dafür kaufen?'¹ but such mercantile meditations must be instantly repressed. Only the other thought remains: perhaps it is a lack of love for others that makes what one has to say a hard saying for them. One tunes one's guitar for a great song, and nothing is heard save a sound of riddles. 'I will arise and go unto my Father and will say unto him: "Give me a slate and a piece of chalk that I may work out the problem of life eternal."' Funny and sad. But after all that is not such a bad mixture; a sort of gooseberry tart in morals. . . .

I don't tell you anything about Lisl's last months because you must have heard all from the Fiedlers. I am glad you feel in sympathy with them. I saw them again with a distinct feeling of pleasure.

Good-night to you.

H.

Rome.

February 2, 1892.

. . . Why do you say that it is not sure when or if the Mass is to be performed? What is up now? Tell me also the result of your trip to Vienna.

You seem to be full of spirits just now,² which is not always incompatible with hours of keen sorrow—a sable slashing to a golden robe. What fine company you are—and would be—in this mood! . . .

H.

Rome.

February 29, 1892.

. . . I don't think it possible to make the acquaintance of your friend Count Primoli under the circumstances. It would lead to trouble. Besides which I am not a man of the world. I have managed to learn with an infinite expenditure of divination, attention, and thought, how to pay a visit to a lady without feeling like a fool, but with creatures of my own sex I am not capable of the effort.

¹ 'What can be purchased with that?'

² It was Levi's estimate of the Mass that induced these high spirits.

The last time I tried I failed miserably. They must be highly cultivated writers like Henry James and Rod¹ (read : *Les idées morales du temps présent* ; it is a pretty book) or business men for me not to feel distressed like a fish out of water in their company. I never find anything to say to them and labour under the painful impression (probably an illusion) that they are eyeing me with hostile curiosity. The man of the world is a terror to me and the higher his spirits the lower mine sink. . . .

H.

FROM E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

[*Battles between the senses and the spirit.*]

March 15, 1892.

. . . I have a new man friend,² such a dear fellow. I really like him—feel more affectionate towards him, I mean, than any man I ever met except one.

I have been having very queer musings lately (*not* apropos of the man or anything to do with him). How one can combine feeling as easily as I do about all sorts of things the moralists condemn, and yet be irrevocably committed, *as I am*, to 'moral earnestness' I don't know. But for a certain twist in my nature what a startling career I should have had ! I wonder if you would like me better that way ?

Anyhow, I can't work my two natures into any sort of harmonious whole, and can only, on the one hand, give the rein to impulses I can't wholly stultify and which I see no vileness in (I draw a great line though ; the question of *where* is individual, but I have found out mine) and on the other cling most trustingly to inward revelations and apprehensions which I know to be the biggest truths I have hit upon, and for me the most vital. Result (like the old man who believed in eating what he liked and drinking

¹ Edouard Rod, a Swiss novelist who at that time had a certain vogue and was a friend of both H. B. and his wife. Early in their acquaintance Harry had found out that the problem of Rod's life was much the same as ours, and I fancy that his friendship just saved Rod from despair.

² Arthur Benson.

what he liked and then smoking a pipe) 'I let 'em fight it out among themselves.'

Your
E.

FROM H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

[*Sensuality and spirituality compatible.*]

March 24, 1892.

. . . You ask if I would like you better if there were not in your nature the twist that prevents you from having 'a startling career,' such, I presume, as Ninon de l'Enclos? Certainly not. I like Ninon in imagination because my lot is cast among proper, sober, decorous people and I thirst for the spontaneous; but if my lot were cast among Ninon and her friends I think I should long with an aching longing for things which I suppose you call Christ. And there is this to be considered; although there is nothing vile or ugly or mean that I can see in sexual excitement taken in itself, yet it is no fit basis for social intercourse, so that the circles, the company in which people deliberately go in for it are debasing. I wonder that no learned treatise or careful paper should yet have been written under this title: 'Why is lasciviousness *not* considered a virtue?' It would hinge on the difference between imagination and perception . . . but I am not going to write that treatise now.

I imagine that the line you say you have to draw, and know where to draw, is determined by that very difference. For my part I am conscious of a certain striving within me that puts all this sort of thing aside and which is as the rising of the sun; and then of the setting of the sun, the return of night, during which all one sees by daylight is hidden, and the great tranquil universe appears. That is the moment for morality to hide her diminished head—very often at least. The strange thing to my mind is that there should be no official recognition of the stars; the sun alone is praised and worshipped. It makes me think that there are very few sensual people. Probably nine-tenths of those who pass as such only enjoy playing tricks on propriety. They are like little boys making faces at the

schoolmaster's back ; and of course as soon as they have got over their mischief they are more or less ashamed of themselves. Indeed they must have looked like fools. And others again set to work conscientiously and try to be sensual, as a half-educated German tries to be intellectual. They ought to be knighted for it. It must be very hard work for them. What I love to believe in is the building and the destruction of the temple ; build to destroy, and destroy to build—the temple being the strong integrated self with all its refinement and beauty (and thus far I am willing to accept the Christian ideal) and the destruction thereof being just what you find so difficult to reconcile with this ideal. When you talk like that you belong to me, and it makes me ill for a few days with a mixture of happiness and distress. . . . Enough.

H.

April 2, 1892.

. . . You must tell me more about the Bensons ; I have no clear idea of your relation to them, nor indeed of their inward mechanism. That is to say Miss Benson struck me as a familiar type (a first impression subject to correction). There is the same race in New England. I know those eyes and that forehead ; the grace, and loftiness, and the limitations thereof. And it quite agrees with my dreamings that she and you must take a different view of religion. But her mother ? She is more difficult to class, and she had some sudden and subtle turns of thought that would make me fancy she could understand anything. . . . But one never knows what little thing may be a terrible stumbling block. . . . I hope you will be able to smooth it away—unless perchance it is *me* !—which I hardly imagine. . . .¹

H.

Valais.

July 7, 1892.

. . . Rod is fearfully sentimental ; perhaps you couldn't stand him. Not that he gushes about nature, fortunately,

¹ Unfortunately it *was* H. B. !

but *il a le culte des souvenirs* like Chateaubriand : 'This is the valley where . . .' 'This is the rock which . . .' 'Such were the flowers that . . .' 'Here she sat and there did I muse . . .' '*O lac, l'année à peine a fini sa carrière,*' etc., etc. Botheration. But he is also subtle and witty at other times, thank goodness, and has no vanity in him. A tender nature and a very dear fellow . . .

[*Here follows a long explanation of why it will be so easy for him to pay for the printing of the Mass, but as was said above the Empress saw to that.*]

Nyon.

August 9, 1892.

. . . Concerning your long silence : Rod asks me now and then if I have heard from England (which means you) and when I answer no he marvels at my quiet dignity. Whereupon I tell him that our idea of a big friendship reminds me of salmon killing ; you get your hook well into the fellow and let him run if he wants to ; he is bound to come back if you don't snap the line by jerking it. And one is turn about the salmon and the fisher.

Let me run to Champéry, dear fisher, and dear King fish !

Your

H.

[*Sympathy v. Principles : Thomas Hardy : On Action.*]

Nyon.

August 26, 1892.

Here is Arthur Benson's letter, with thanks.¹ It is a good letter, notwithstanding the mistake your marginal note corrects most conclusively. It is quite true : his people are constitutional proselytisers ; they judge persons by ideals. They know the Father's will ; and whoever does it, behold, that is their brother and their sister. People of the other temperament—ours I believe—judge ideals by persons. What those whom they love do, behold that surely is the Father's will. What other means is there of knowing

¹ See *ante* ; letter from Arthur Benson of August 9, 1892.

it, without taking one's own brain as canon? I have more confidence in my sympathies than in my opinions; and so have you, who are friends with an infidel; *they* have more confidence in their opinions than in their instinctive affection and are ready to correct the latter by the former. I recognise the fact and it quite agrees with the impression I had of the daughter: 'New-England through and through' as I told you; and her brother speaks of the Puritan strain. But how her mother's more fluid brain can accommodate itself to this temperament is obscure to me; she must suffer much. Tell me, do you know any Christians besides yourself who are not of this temperament? I only know of Pfeiderer—and even he would need qualifying restrictively. I told Mary Hunter at Aix that I considered your Christianity anomalous because you say of it: 'It is the truth for me, of others I cannot speak.' It occurs to me sometimes that herein may lie the value and great utility of something to which I am sadly refractory—ceremony and observances. As they have no meaning people need not disagree about them. They can stand for an act of the will, for an aspiration which we cannot put in words without beginning to snarl at one another.

Of course when I say that what those do whom we love is right, I mean this in the most general way, taking them all in all, though there may be points which we fail to understand or perchance dislike. But we could not turn away from them because they will not live as we may wish them to live, because we cannot draw them into our favourite fold. It is the Bensons who turn away from you, not you from them. I think A. B.'s advice is good. It cannot be changed for the present.

All this notwithstanding I think we ought to be very lenient towards those who cut us off from their good graces because we are not what they hoped we were; not just like them.

It must be rather intoxicating, this identity of aim and of ways; a mighty confirmation of one's self; and the awaking from the dream must be bitter. I have never forgotten my brother's disappointment when he discovered

that his first friend—a Swedish boy—preferred mealy potatoes to waxy ones. I think he never quite regained his confidence in human nature. He was of the proselytising temperament and proudly scorned the admission that waxy potatoes might taste better to some palates. He dropped his friend ; and I as a younger brother and confidant was witness to his sorrow. This parable may be met by the haughty aphorism : ‘ Virtue ain’t potatoes.’ Granted, but it is food—or nothing ; and we ought to be free to choose our diet. The only question is : Are we well fed or scrofulous ? Thriving or puny ? And I take sympathy to be the voice that exclaims unmistakably within us : behold this one thrives. If we cannot understand how, we must simply accept the mystery as a sign of our ignorance. And if our sympathy goes out to others who reject it because of our different diet, that merely shows that they manage to thrive in spite of an intolerance which would kill us ; and all we can say is what Huss said to the old woman who threw sticks on his burning pile : ‘ *Sancta simplicitas !* ’ Enough.

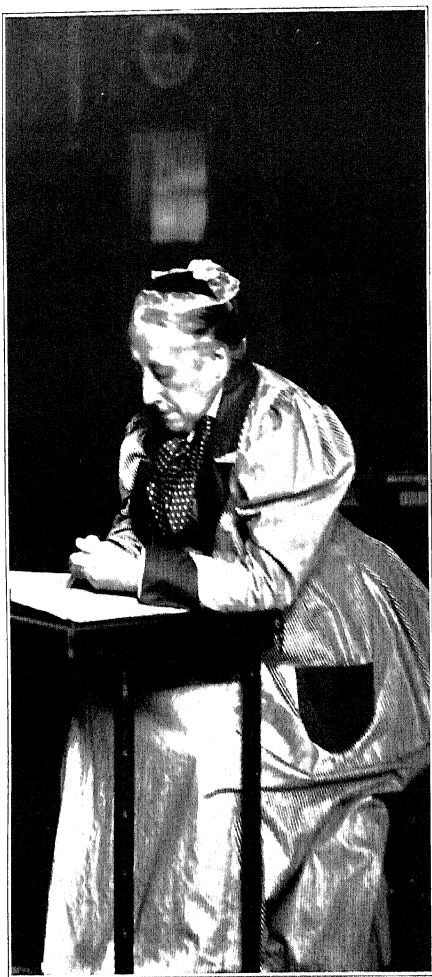
I am glad you recognise Wilde’s cleverness and that he does know about art. He is odious ; such a little personality ! but one must be just. He knows ; and he can write. . . .

I have been much entertained by Hardy’s ‘ Group of Noble Dames.’ They are all of them in the family way ; which is as it should be ; and some of the stories are capitally imagined. I read *Tess* that your friend Miss Milman recommended so warmly. She too (I mean Tess) though not a noble dame, shares this honour with them—against her will, poor child. Whence tears and bloodshed. It is partly beautiful and partly utter rubbish. . . .

What is action ? As far as I can make out action is earning money, or exploring new lands in order that others may earn money there. All the rest is art or sentiment or thought or pleasure. Good things too. But a little action must be a pleasant change. Sometimes I sit here in my room, waiting for ideas or for words in torpid languor ; and I feel as foolish as a child who is holding a shell to his

ear to hear the voice of the sea instead of sailing out over the equator and far away. But then there is an answer to that thought and a rejoinder to the answer ; the tritons and the mermaids have begun to sing ; and I am not sure at last that the ocean and the shores beyond it, even the mountains of the moon, would not hold easily in a single drop of water that drips from the shell. . . .

H.



THE HON. LADY PONSONBY

CHAPTER VI

(1890-1916)

LADY PONSONBY

IT must have been in the middle 'eighties that I first set eyes on Lady Ponsonby. I had accompanied some foreign ladies who were staying with the Empress Eugénie at Farnborough Hill to a minor military function at Aldershot—sports I fancy—and one of the Princesses was giving away the prizes. Madame Arcos, a sort of unofficial lady-in-waiting to the Empress who was shepherding the Farnborough Hill contingent, after presenting her homages to the Princess exchanged a few words with a short striking-looking woman evidently in attendance on Her Royal Highness. So instantly did she arrest my attention that I asked who she was. 'Oh, that's Lady Ponsonby—wife of the Queen's private secretary,' said Madame Arcos; and another woman, reputed to be in the know as to Court gossip, volunteered 'A very clever woman—said to be the only person the Queen is afraid of'; or it may have been 'the only person she is afraid of is the Queen.' In after years I related this incident to Lady Ponsonby, adding that my informant had a relation who was something or other at the Court. 'Probably one of the footmen,' said Lady Ponsonby, and indeed, whichever it was, a sillier statement cannot be imagined. The Queen can never have been afraid of anyone, unless perhaps of him who had mastered her by love. Yet it appears that though she liked clever men, she was not quite at her ease with clever women,

suspecting them of holding the 'advanced' views she so greatly disapproved—an interesting contributory touch to the eternal sex question, but of course it has nothing to do with being afraid. As for Lady Ponsonby, capable in matters of feeling of sounding deeper depths than most people, her sentiment for the Queen was certainly one of the major emotions of her life. But to use the word 'fear' in connection with that dauntless spirit sounds as fantastic as it would in the case of Richard Cœur de Lion or Queen Elizabeth.

Then came the years when I was so much at the Deanery at Windsor, and gathering on all sides that Lady Ponsonby was, in truth, a remarkable woman, of course I longed to meet her. One day—I think it must have been in 1890—her two daughters, Betty and Maggie, came to tea; and shortly afterwards, on the 'cutlet for cutlet' principle, Edith Davidson and I were duly bidden to Norman Tower, the official residence of the Queen's private secretary, and at last I found myself in the presence of the lady of the house.

But not for long. Afternoon tea was a ceremony that bored her, and what she had heard so far of Edith Davidson's friend, Ethel Smyth, had not inspired her with a wish to make my acquaintance. On the contrary! True, Sir Walter Parratt, the beloved organist of St. George's Chapel, had specially praised my counterpoint, and as the Ponsonbys were musical this should have told in my favour. But Lady Ponsonby was also aware of my passion for hunting, and declared that a contrapuntist *doublé* with Fred Archer, as she put it, sounded very tiresome. As soon therefore as politeness allowed she pleaded urgent letters and vanished.

In my youth I sang a great deal, and Edith now suggested I should sing my own edition of the beautiful Irish melody 'Come o'er the Sea' to the girls. No sooner was it over than Betty jumped up saying, 'Mama *must* hear that,' ran out of the room, and presently came back

leading in her reluctant and deeply sceptical mother. The song was repeated and after that there were no further difficulties ; in fact it became my habit to bribe her with music and then settle down to the interminable talks that were to be my joy for the next twenty-six years.

As transformed by Lady Ponsonby nothing could be less suggestive of officialdom than Norman Tower, and the same was true of the London house in St. James's Palace. Some people have a knack of converting their dwellings into an outer shell of their own personality, and this miracle was even performed on Gilmuire near Ascot, the essentially modern house she bought after Sir Henry's death and in which the rest of her life was to be spent. But nowhere could a more perfect setting for the unique quality of this greatest of great ladies exist than Norman Tower—a dwelling hacked out of the thickness of the outer wall of the Castle (this is a flight of fancy but gives a good idea of the place) and perched above the old moat, now converted into a hanging garden. Most of this garden circled round the tower at an acute angle, and on a flat portion of it, Lady Ponsonby, who adored anything to do with tools, had erected a shed with carpenter's bench and lathe.

In former times the guard were lodged in Norman Tower, of which two octagonal chambers served as State prisons, and one of Lady Ponsonby's first preoccupations was to obtain through her great friend among the Princesses, the Empress Frederick, the Queen's permission to tear down the plaster and paint with which some philistine official had thought to brighten up these sad rooms. The two ladies themselves took a hand in this work and presently names and rough *graffiti*, scratched prisoner-wise with nails, revealed themselves on the walls, which of course were now left bare. The Prisons became Lady Ponsonby's sanctum and the extraordinarily characteristic furniture included a tool table with a glass of water on it ready for

painting. In fact there were facilities for 'occupations,' as the family used to call them, all over the house ; in her bedroom window an easel at which she often painted, in another little room a table sacred to silver repoussé work, and books, books, books everywhere.

My very first encounter with her brought one of the sharp joys that, so far, the rough file of piled-up years has been powerless to blunt—the strange, half physical pleasure a beautiful speaking voice can still induce in the present writer, and if this looks like extravagance of sensation, it is an extravagance permissible in a musician. In Lady Ponsonby's case the effect was heightened by a clean-cut enunciation slightly tinged with a soft Northumbrian burr—no doubt a feminine edition of the same thing in Harry Hotspur's speech and, as in his case, the charm lay perhaps in the fact that it was so emphatically herself. I never knew what my Christian name could sound like till she came to use it, and to my present-day delight, her daughter Betty utters the two syllables in exactly the same way.

The next visit provided another vivid impression. She was seated at her writing-table the appliances of which were as carefully thought out as a conjuror's stock-in-trade, and anything with steel, silver or brass about it had a burnish one came to associate with her mental operations. But what specially struck me was the way her small extremely strong hands tackled ordinary little tasks, such as sharpening a pencil, sealing a letter, adjusting a lamp, finding her place in a book—rapid, delicate, accurate movements as of a world in which fumbling is unknown. Later on I grasped the fascination these things had for me ; it was the suggestion of force combined with restraint—the swift, controlled energy of the violent. Once I said to her : ' There's nothing exciting about picking up a pin with an old pair of scissors. But suppose some huge hammer, capable of squashing a Great Northern engine as flat as a flounder, and furnished with tiny claws at the end, were to descend rapidly, noise-

lessly, and pick up that pin, wouldn't it thrill you ?' And though told not to talk nonsense I think the idea pleased her, for she was rather proud of her muscular strength, and only a couple of years before her death made me feel her biceps, remarking, 'Not bad for eighty-two !'

Alas, the wasted years of one's life ! I think I did not see her again till I was at Cap Martin with the Empress Eugénie in April 1891, when she and the girls who were at Mentone came to lunch and I used to go over there. It was on that lovely coast that Betty became engaged to a persistent suitor, Colonel Montgomery, who had followed her to the Riviera to secure what Germans call 'the yes-word.' I have never forgotten one of Bill Montgomery's remarks, so true, so simple was it, and its effectiveness so amusingly increased by an unhurried delivery. 'I always think it a mistake,' he said, 'to say a man's not a gentleman, because'—(*a pause*)—'you so often find out he is.'

In Mentone I acquired a new feather for my cap inasmuch as I persuaded Lady Ponsonby against her will to read Anatole France. She was a great authority on French literature of a certain kind, St. Simon, Pascal, Brunetière, Jules Lemaître and so on, and had no reason whatever for confidence in my literary judgment. Finally, after I had threatened to train a parrot to say 'Anatole France' and send it to Windsor—the Empress adding '*vous savez elle en est capable*'—she consented to accept the loan of my *Thaïs*, and from that moment the author became a standing dish in her *menu*. In after years, admitting that she liked undefeatedness, she once said : 'The first symptom of it I noticed in you was the way you bullied me into reading Anatole France.'

After that we must have met occasionally, for in a letter to my brother I find mention of a 'wonderful new friend of mine, stepped straight out of the eighteenth century.' But this was true in a limited sense only, for in essential

matters, as be seemed the granddaughter of Earl Grey, she was a modern woman. When Girton College was started in the early 'sixties, Mrs. Ponsonby, then a young married woman, was, together with Miss Emily Davies, one of the hardest workers on the original committee. And ten years later when the first Trade Union for women came into existence no member of the board was more indefatigable than she. Like other young women she was fond of riding, skating, dancing, and society, but she seems always to have gravitated towards people who had serious interests in life. Indeed, such was her respect for intellectual achievement, that when presented to George Eliot, before she realised what was happening she suddenly found herself in the midst of one of the profound curtseys she reserved exclusively for the Queen.

Never was a woman of more catholic tastes. From the first she had been devoted to music and painting, and like all Bulteels took her own line in all things. She told me that she fancied the Queen had selected her as maid of honour not because she was the niece of her private secretary, General Grey, but partly because she had the reputation of being a first-rate actress, and chiefly because she was of a different type from the generality of courtiers. None the less, when Sir Henry, who had been equerry to the Prince Consort, succeeded General Grey, according to Lady Ponsonby it took his Sovereign Lady ten years to understand that the former maid of honour had no ambition to pull strings. Shrewd though the Queen was, I suppose no potentate can be expected to assume complete indifference to intrigue in the wife of one so near the throne as the royal private secretary—particularly if that wife is a woman of brilliant intellect and strong personality.

Casting my thoughts back across the prelude period of our relation I recall one intensely comic episode that took place in the spring of 1892.

When the Queen was away her opera and concert

tickets were often put at Lady Ponsonby's disposal, and on one of these occasions she asked me to dine and go with her to hear the Joachim Quartet. She rather liked being thus franked by her Royal Mistress and sailed into St. James's Hall (we were late) cursorily displaying the Royal pasteboard to an awed policeman. At the door of the Concert Hall an exceedingly dirty attendant, much bewildered, began spitting on his fingers and fumbling with the cards, till Lady Ponsonby's peremptory 'Don't do that, man !' so alarmed him that he hastily pushed them back into my hands and ushered us into the front row of . . . a Christy Minstrel entertainment !

Lady Ponsonby had mistaken the date, and the Christy Minstrels, whom repairs had driven from their downstairs haunts, had been permitted for the time being to perform in the hall sacred to highbrow music and political speaking. I did not know her well enough to give way utterly to laughter, than which nothing would have gone worse with her evident fury as she whirled round and left the premises. It can rarely have happened to her to find herself in a ridiculous position, and I doubt if she was in the slightest degree amused. But Princess Louise and Maggie were when I told them about it.

That summer I was held down by pressing work, and though I did not know it at the time, a terrible anxiety hung over my new friend. Lord Revelstoke, head of Baring's Bank, was Lady Ponsonby's brother-in-law, and ever since 1890, when the bank failed, the health of her specially loved sister Lady Revelstoke had also been failing. In October she died. Not long afterwards when I was lunching at St. James's, Lady Ponsonby made a brief allusion to her sister's death, and then, in the inflection of her voice, the look on her face—it was but a flash and quickly veiled—I surprised one secret of the hold she had on all who came within her orbit—her power of deep passionate love.

To my mind this quality in human beings corresponds to the burning core of the globe we live on, the true secret of life on this planet rather than the sun, which equally illumines dead moons. Lady Ponsonby's equipment included many other qualities it is easy to catalogue—intelligence, culture, sense of humour, courage, inflexible rectitude, sense of duty, and a religious instinct which I once pleased her by defining as a blend of paganism and Christian mysticism. But in no human being I have ever met were hidden such inexhaustible stores of fire as in the heart of this apparently calm, deliberately reserved, rather sphinx-like being, who possessed among other peculiarities the art of settling down with her book or newspaper in her armchair, or in a railway carriage—quiet as the hills and as though established there for all eternity.

Let me try to describe her person. The mould of the face was massive, the hair wavy and grey. She always wore a cap, but in her dressing-room you could verify what you would have affirmed on oath without knowledge—that what grew beneath it was alive and plentiful. The whole build expressed energy and powers of endurance. Of her hands and feet she herself would have said : ' I hope they are the hands and feet of a lady.' Her eyes, greyish-blue, or rather bluish-grey, had a light-holding quality I have seen in more obviously striking orbs, but eyes more arresting I have never looked into ; and when she was angry, furiously angry, they turned so coal-black that one member of the family would say to another when temperatures were rising, ' You needn't have black eyes about it ! '

The other day I paid a visit to a favourite neighbour of mine, the Silent Pool at Albury. The folk-associations of the place are sinister—something about a licentious King pursuing on horseback a maiden who, to escape him, flung herself into the water and was drowned. But I said to myself, ' What nonsense.' The sudden dip in the Dorking

Hills where are nursed and collected the springs that feed the pool ; the crystal clearness of water that is seldom or never stirred by the wind in that hollow ; the stately reflection of its ring of beeches ; all this suggests depth and stillness, but not, to my mind, tragedy. Yet some specific association it did awaken. What could it be ? I felt it stirring in my heart as I gazed, trying to rememorse it. Suddenly it came to me. . . . Lady Ponsonby's eyes !

It was always engrossing to watch expression chasing expression across that fraudulently impassive face of hers. Her nephew Maurice Baring, who afterwards became one of my greatest friends, once said to me that he would be content to spend his life watching her face. She was devoted to Maurice, who at that time was studying German at Hildesheim, and had reached a stage of youthful effervescence which those who have only known him since he came relatively to years of discretion—say, since the war—may have difficulty in realising. I remember Lady Ponsonby frigidly remarking, ' I wish Maurice did not think it amusing to shy his spectacles into the fire ' . . . Yes ! words like ' shy ' and ' bag ' had crept into the intimate vocabulary of this mother of three sons, and occasionally turned up in the oddest way. For instance, I remember her remarking in connection with a mutual acquaintance who was given to timid deprecating pilferings in the matrimonial or extra-matrimonial preserves of her friends, that she hoped I never stooped to that sort of ' mesquinerie '—' so like the maids priggish hairpins.' ¹

As hinted in the above sentence, the chief peculiarity of her diction was a habit that might have been irritating in anyone else of interlarding it with French phrases to such an extent, that one never heard her use the English equivalents of *hochements de tête*, *l'infiniment petit*, *injures*, *mesquineries*,

¹ The family declare ' prig ' was never one of her usual locutions. If so, her use of it here is an instance of her unerring selection of the exact word that fits a given action !

inepties, à *tête reposée*, and dozens of similar words. And a thing she never could get over was, that the fluent French speaker I think I can claim to have been in those days should be so hopelessly inaccurate in her genders ; ‘ And you a musician too ! ’ I once asked Maurice how they felt towards her when they were children, and after reflection he replied, ‘ Well, we felt it would never do to get our *genres* wrong in Aunt M’aimée’s presence.’

This accuracy expressed itself in the extreme daintiness of her person, a point of coquetry which she considered obligatory in the old. Not that she appeared to take much interest in the actual cut of her clothes, in fact I suspect that many women of her age and epoch whom no one could accuse of over-fussiness in such matters gave them more thought in a month than she did in a year. And though I never saw her ‘ trying on,’ I feel convinced that, patient up to a certain point, the moment would come for a decided ‘ Thank you, that will do,’ after which, let the fitter plead as she might, no further pullings and pinchings and pokings would have been submitted to.

But when she sallied forth to dine with the Queen, or to attend some function it would not quite do to disregard, I loved to see her for once in a way in a handsome gown, wearing her ribbons and orders and all the rest of it— ‘ *Cela ne gâte rien*,’ as the Empress’s old *Dame d’Honneur* Madame le Breton used to say when urging me to put my hat on straight, and even the most precious stones (I am alluding not to myself but to Lady Ponsonby) look none the worse for a fine setting.

Perhaps in London you still come across women over sixty who, though fond of the world, do not consider it necessary to have their faces lifted and dress for eighteen. (Of an old cousin of hers, now dead, who was one of the pioneers in the heroic art of rejuvenescence, my friend, the great musician Violet Woodhouse, once remarked, ‘ She

doesn't look eighteen now, she looks like a horrid little girl with a hoop.') Anyhow, looking round me to-day I often think of the very different but equally careful ritual that determined the later stages of Lady Ponsonby's toilet. I can see her now, ensconced at her dressing-table, static as though sitting for a portrait by some French painter (he would have to be French) called 'La Toilette de Madame O . . .' And when the hair brushing and cap adjusting were finished to her satisfaction, her maid would pin round her neck a very fine towel, holding up its lower edge while her mistress, with rapid unerring aim would trim her nails. Then the four corners were gathered together and the splinters carefully shaken into the fire, or if there was none, still more carefully carried out of the room ; after which Lady Ponsonby was ready for the labours of the day. Once, when they were not at St. James's, her niece Elizabeth Castlerosse and I had dinner there, *tête-à-tête*, and we were '*émotionnée*,' as she herself would have put it, at the faint perfume that clung to all the rooms ; rosewater and something else, we wondered what, but it was her perfume and no one else's.

How curiously the mind dwells on little traits of this kind when you think of those you have loved ; so much so that it is an effort to turn to aspects generally considered more important.

‘ Lady Ponsonby was alarmingly *clever*, wasn't she ? ’ someone asked the other day—a question that induced reflections on a subject no two people agree about, what the word ‘ clever ’ means. Excellent judges like two great friends of hers, Arthur Benson and Edmund Gosse, would certainly have called her one of the ‘ cleverest ’ women of their acquaintance, and so would many other people. Yet to my mind it was more a case of the highest degree of intelligence, including a rapid, far-reaching grasp of any subject she cared to consider, an intuitive perception of the

other person's point of view—'the spirit of Monsieur le Comte de Juste Milieu' as she used to call it, and the mental habit of always taking a bee-line to the essential. If all this means cleverness, then that is the right word for her, but to me it suggests brains of various other types and not exactly hers ; people like Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, George Eliot, Rebecca West, Mrs. Benson, Vernon Lee, or G. Bernard Shaw, for instance.

Explaining one's meaning being sometimes so difficult, it is perhaps best to toss up into the air a couple of names like Darwin and Montaigne, and invite psycho- and philosophical experts to weigh, analyse, define, and contrast two such shining examples of brain-supremacy, and then pronounce on the true significance of the word 'cleverness'—tasks that demand a specially trained intelligence to which alas ! the present writer can advance no claim.

I say little about either the metaphysical or the political strains, because, although many letters in Maggie's *Memoir* of her mother show that Lady Ponsonby, always deeply absorbed in politics, was at one time addicted to methodical wrestling with subjects such as Hylo-idealism (?) and Nietzsche's philosophy, when I came to know her it was my impression that much as these matters still interested her, the salt of life lay for her in the study of personality ; and our mutual friend Arthur Benson, who adored her, was of the same opinion. Even books—and she was a great reader—were perhaps not so much 'literature' to her as keys and foot-notes to human nature. Hence, being untiringly interested in character and temperament, she was always ready for fresh human contacts. There was no direct invitation to outpourings, let alone confidences, but her interest was so genuine, her 'attack,' to use a musical term, so stimulating, that none could help giving her their very best. For, as the German proverb puts it, 'As you call into the wood, so will the wood answer you.'

True, as Arthur Benson said in a charming appreciation of her that appeared in *The Times* after her death, the lightning quickness of her understanding, her incisive, sometimes mordant, wit, her 'enigmatic glance,' combined with the immense fastidiousness and distinction of her manner and utterance, would sometimes disconcert people who did not know her well. Directness, sincerity and impatience of anything approaching the banal and commonplace are not often met with on such an heroic scale. But in spite of innate criticalness her appreciations were so warm and generous, so markedly kind and patient was she with all except the tedious and pretentious, so free, so youthful, so gracious was her spirit, so incapable was she of ever wishing to shine herself, that the end was always the same—complete subjugation of anyone she cared to subjugate. Indeed so great was her gift for inspiring admiration and affection, that, given the large tender heart that beat beneath that impassive exterior, she might well have been embarrassed, one would imagine, by the consciousness of so many would-be intimates gazing longingly up at her windows !

But you felt—and here was another clue to her charm—that if all this were to cease, if life were to strip her bare of all that was most precious to her, she would never consent to go under in mere regret and resignation, but would find a way of living on, not only with courage but with zest, to the very end.

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I spoke of the fire that underlay everything and come now to the quality in her I chiefly delighted in, the extreme violence of her temperament. But let me preface by saying that what must have struck the ordinary observer most strongly of all will have been a serenity it would seem impossible to ruffle. Indeed, to my untold astonishment one of her nieces wrote recently to another member of the family : ' I suppose you know best, but myself I can hardly

believe that dear Aunt M'aimée *could* be violent ! ' ; reading which words I said to myself : ' Then she missed the best part ! '

In my opinion the two things, violence and serenity, are absolutely compatible. Each has its hour. But violence is not one of the traits that figure in epitaphs or even in obituary notices ; and perhaps it is this discretion, this delicacy, this training of an unreal roseate light on the departed that makes all epitaphs and the majority of obituary notices such unsatisfactory reading. No one is more acutely aware of the inadequacy of this little tribute to Lady Ponsonby than its writer, but that particular defect it shall not have ; so without further ado I once more turn to what I have always looked upon as one of the most attractive, the most lovable symptoms of intense vitality.

There was a housekeeper at St. James's, a most efficient woman with a temper so fierce that the mildest request on the part of one of the Ponsonby sons—for instance that the kitchen-maid be told not to boil the eggs hard—often resulted, so one of them told me, in a scene which left him pale and shattered for the rest of the day. But here his mother was in an element that had no terrors for her. Swiftly descending to the housekeeper's room she would shortly reappear, radiant, triumphant, rejuvenated ; ' I don't think,' she would say, ' there'll be any more trouble with Mrs. X yet awhile.'

I remember her telling me at Gilmuire of a heated dispute with the old gentleman who owned the property next to theirs, how in the night he had clambered over the fence and staked out a yard or so on her side of the ditch declaring that this was the true boundary ; how she had marched down with the man-servant, commanding him to pull up the stakes, and how while this was proceeding the old gentleman suddenly appeared on the bank and bade the man stop at once or he would have the law of him.

Whereupon Lady Ponsonby not only ordered him to go on, but began pulling up the stakes herself (I have said she was very muscular) and flinging them back over the bank on which the old gentleman was still vociferating. 'You can't do anything to me,' she told him, 'I have no vote and am not a citizen so don't come within the operation of the law. But let me tell you' (here a vigorous pull at a stake) 'I intend to stick to my rights all the same. And as for you' (whizz bang went the stake—but *not* aimed at the enemy!) 'how dare you come skulking over the fence at dead of night, trespassing on my property?' And stake after stake flew over the fence, while W. . . . murmured nervously, 'Oh, my lady, you'll hurt yourself.'

Another time it was the police she defied. That part of South Ascot was then in the making and the roads were mere heather tracks, all holes and ruts. One evening a message arrived that the Queen intended coming next day to see dear Mary's new house. The gardener and the boy were despatched first thing with shovels and barrows to an adjacent communal gravel pit to dig wherewithal to mend the road, but ere long back they came in perturbation, having been told by a policeman that they would be summoned for stealing. Gathering them under her wing Lady Ponsonby marched them and their barrows straight back to the pit, and meeting the policeman on the way informed him that she did not choose that the life of the Queen of England should be endangered because the Ascot Urban Authorities neglected their duties. Let them summons her if they liked but she intended to take as much gravel as suited her purpose. No more was heard of the incident, but as far as I remember nothing much was done to improve that road during her lifetime.

Speaking for myself, though she was dearer to me than any woman in the world, never in my life, except perhaps with my mother, have I had such elemental rows with

anyone as with Lady Ponsonby, particularly during the first year or two of our friendship. Accustomed to being considered rather violent myself, it always seemed to me that compared with her I was milder than milk and water, but this may have been a delusion. I will confess that in days gone by owners of shrieking canaries and squawking parrots would declare that except when I was in the room the bird never uttered a sound. Similarly when in third-class carriages horrid little children slithered off laps, wriggled out of restraining arms, lurched over to me and began pawing me about, their mothers never failed to remark that until I entered the compartment the child had been as good as gold—always *was* good in a train.

By the same token it is possible that a person of violent temperament stirs in another fires that as a rule slumber peacefully beneath the crust superimposed by years and philosophy. All I know is, that when angry—with me at least—she would literally say anything, I mean really outrageous things, such as accusing you of taking and losing her favourite penknife (for twopence it would have been her purse !) and being afraid to confess ! Finally, having goaded you to madness, she would say in icy tones : ‘ Pray don’t let us have the *scène aux cheveux* about a piece of cutlery.’ (*Scène aux cheveux* was an expression applied by someone to the moment in melodrama where the heroine, betrayed by her lover, lets down her back hair.)¹

After the break up of my old home I took a cottage at Frimley, about seven miles from Gilmuire, and often used to bike over and stay the night, while Maggie, rightly judging that ‘ two’s company and three’s none,’ would dine with their neighbour the Ranee of Sarawak. One night after dinner in the midst of some extra-fierce argument Lady Ponsonby remarked, ‘ Will you kindly shut that door unless you wish every word you say to be overheard by the

¹ It occurs in Victor Hugo’s *Françillon*, I believe.

servants you are so fond of imitating.' At this I jumped up, ran into the porch, and began lighting my bicycle lamp. It was 9.30, a wild, wet, blustering, King-Lear night, and the long Bagshot Hill and seven miles of pedal work against the wind lay between me and my cottage. The drawing-room door opened and Lady Ponsonby advanced into the hall. 'What on earth are you doing?' she asked, and I flattered myself her voice sounded rather alarmed, 'don't be absurd—put out that lamp.' I uttered one word only—'Goodnight,' and shot out into the storm. Next day Maggie wrote to Betty: 'When I got back Ethel had been gone half an hour, and the house was still rocking.'

But if she thought she had been in fault or had gone too far, the warm generous note on which the *amende honorable* was pitched might almost have tempted you to work up another tempest ere long. The fact is one could not take them quite seriously, not at least if you knew she was fond of you, and in many of her letters I find remarks of this kind: 'The worst of it is that when one is full of remorse and ready to *abaisser* oneself before you, you stare and don't seem to know what one is talking about.' Perhaps I was the only person in the world who had *scènes aux cheveux* with Lady Ponsonby, but if there were others I am sure they will have thought about it afterwards—if at all—with a blend of amusement and increased affection. As for her, though of course you apologised in all sincerity for your share in the *bourrasque* (it is impossible to write about her without dragging in French words) you felt it was rather like apologising to the flagship of the High Seas fleet for heading into a hurricane.

As I write two folk memories come back to me, and I think the first one, a legend about an Arab horse that said to its master, 'Ride me like an enemy, feed me like a friend,' would have delighted Lady Ponsonby—as it does me.

The second is a beautiful line in one of Fritz Reuter's Platt-Deutsch stories (in dialect it takes about six words)

to the effect that love is like the trees on that wild Mecklenburg coast ; storms in the upper branches merely drive in the roots deeper still. So it was with this friendship—the happiest, the most satisfying, and for that reason the most restful of all my many friendships with women.

Have I dwelt too much on the fiery element in her nature ? If so, one who has already confessed to Zoroastrianism may be forgiven, and it is easy, and good fun too (which is always a consideration), to recall such episodes in the private history of one in whom these potentialities were hidden behind an alluring mask of laziness, remoteness, and serenity that the uninitiated might almost have mistaken for indifference. But how give an idea in a thumbnail sketch of qualities like loveliness or charm ?—of the warmth, the loyalty, the appreciativeness she put into her human relationships ? And then the unmitigatedness of her, the fun of her ! How she would laugh at you, what an energising force even in the lives of people who apparently needed no stimulus ! And below all the certainty that if all the world failed you, her faith and affection would never fail.

Pour out a glass of wine, hold it against the light, and possibly you may guess something about its pedigree, but not until your lips have done their part do you know the full meaning of the words ‘ a beaker full of the warm south.’ In order to supplement with fine subtle touches that cannot be worked into a mere outline (though perhaps what is yet to come may do that office) you must have drunk deeply at the source. But if externals accounted for part of the charm—her exquisite speaking voice, for instance, her distinction, her shrewd, extremely original and amusing turns of speech (shot through with old-world pronunciation of words like *tossel*, *balcôny*, *yaller*), the real source of her dominion was, in my opinion, the automatic working up to the surface of a deep, noble, most lovable nature.

Probably vitality is one of the very few qualities the value of which none disputes (unless in the case of an odious rich relation whose fortune you hope to inherit), and if I have not given my readers some faint idea of Lady Ponsonby's vitality, then this sketch is a lamentable failure. I remember many instances of the vigorous way she would throw herself into the interest of the moment. Here is a typical one. After seeing the great Japanese actress Sada Jakko, she was proceeding home alone in her brougham—a royal conveyance with the royal crest on it—when the traffic was held up for quite a long time, and she gradually became aware of pitying horrified faces gazing in at the window. No wonder, for quite unconsciously she was imitating the convulsive epileptic contortions which appear to be on the Japanese stage the accepted convention for unrequited love. Being a wonderful mimic she was working up the rôle of Sada Jakko's lover for Maggie's benefit.

I remember Maggie (who, alas! died in 1934) telling me that when they were children they were never allowed to idle about aimlessly, but taught from the first to have resources in themselves. 'I shouldn't object to your being bored,' she would say, 'if it were not that people who let themselves be bored end by becoming such terrible bores themselves.' This picture was completed by Fritz, my particular friend among 'the boys,' who wrote to me the other day : 'Mama entered into everything we did or tried to do to such an extent, that I often think if I had been a shoeblack she would have taken this up, bought books on the subject, and told me how the French black boots, etc.' All of us younger friends of hers who tried to do anything, the Gleichens for instance and many others, will recognise her in that sentence.

From the above may be guessed in what spirit she followed her sons' careers when they grew up. She was a good Liberal, and delighted when her youngest son emerged on the Labour side. Also, perhaps with a view

to getting a rise out of a Tory like myself, there were many allusions to the Conservatives as 'the stupid party.' Nevertheless, as I often told her, much to her annoyance, there was a remarkable similarity between some of her views and those of Lord Salisbury. 'Have you read his speech?' I would ask. 'No, and I really can't be bothered to' (she pronounced her *a*'s north-country-wise, making 'can't' rhyme with 'pant'). 'Very well,' I would reply, 'then I will tell you what he said,' and here would follow a rapid summary of the speech. And Lady Ponsonby's probable rejoinder would be, 'I don't expect it was quite as *glib* as that! . . . ' But I won't touch upon politics, particularly as during the last five years of her life I was only interested in them from the point of view of Women's Suffrage, and, like Mrs. Pankhurst, was utterly infuriated with the Liberal and Labour parties, who, if they had lived up honestly to their canting professions, could have rendered all the horrors of that long struggle impossible.

The duets of married couples are always amusing to listen to ; and when, as in the case of the Ponsonbys, both performers are really remarkable people, superabundantly endowed with sense of humour ; when they perfectly understand and are devoted to each other, to watch them can be better than going to the play. I knew Sir Henry very little and was rather frightened of him, partly because of his extreme courtesy, than which there is no more effective shield ; also because rather formidable, or perhaps I should say impressive, qualities peeped out through his very quiet manner—indifference, for instance, and matchless integrity. You felt he never had sought, never could seek anything for himself, not even in the way of recognition. If the right thing were done he didn't care two straws who did it, and one cannot imagine his saying or even implying that the suggestion came from him. One of the finest attributes of the old Queen was her instinct as to the choice of her

intimate advisers, or of such instruments of her will as would naturally be much in personal contact with her. And when I came to have the privilege of meeting and admiring the German Emperor, I could but wish he had inherited his grandmother's *flair* for spiritual incorruptibility in his surroundings. The Queen once told Lady Ponsonby that her uncle, General Grey, who had been Sir Henry's predecessor, was the only person who had ever said to her 'right across the table, before everybody': 'Madam, that is *not* so !' And it was amusing to read somewhere the other day that she once asked Lady Ponsonby to 'tell Sir Henry kindly' (she didn't like to tell him herself, she said, for fear of hurting his feelings) that when she made a remark he really must not say 'that is absurd.' One would have enjoyed being present when Lady Ponsonby executed this commission. And I have often wondered if it ever came to Her Majesty's ears that when a certain Prime Minister asked him to find out whether she would sanction the Beefeaters going to Cowes to receive the German Emperor, Sir Henry's answer was, 'The Queen says she'll be damned if the Beefeaters shall leave London.'

It may be imagined that *blasé* statesmen found such a man refreshing to deal with, and I remember little incidents that gave one an inkling of his quality and should have put me completely at my ease with him. This sort of thing. A certain friend of theirs (and of mine) who on occasion was slightly given to swagger, sailed into luncheon one day, followed by a foreign pianist who just then was taking London by storm. And she contrived to convey that Norman Tower might consider itself greatly honoured by this visit, also that no one but herself could have worked the oracle. Sir Henry only came in at the last moment but grasped the situation in a twinkling, and casually asked, as he said good-bye to the intermediary: 'Who's your filthy friend ?'

But what chiefly headed me back was a feeling that this

not particularly strong-looking man had a heavier load of work and responsibility on his shoulders than was good for anyone nearer seventy than sixty ; and from the way he looked at and spoke to her I guessed that his chief joy, relaxation and refreshment was, whenever it was possible, to steal half an hour with his wife. Hence a slight sense of guilt on my part, and a suspicion that in his heart he must often be saying as he opened the door : ‘ There’s that damned Smyth woman again.’ If so, it couldn’t be helped ; as long as she liked me to be there, there I should be. To refrain would have been asking too much of human nature. But if I correctly divined his feeling, mine would have been : ‘ Small blame to him !’

I have often asked myself if Lady Ponsonby was popular with the Queen’s Household. A French abbess has written, ‘ Dans les couvents on n’aime pas beaucoup la supériorité,’ and if the Empress Eugénie was right in maintaining that nothing is more like convent life than life at a Court, that should settle the question. I should imagine, too, that the outlook indicated in the following extract from one of her letters would not commend itself unreservedly in any highly specialised society—the precincts of a cathedral town, for instance :

“ I am the most sociable person in the world if things come naturally, and the most indifferent to popularity if it means paying visits, gathering the Queen’s Household under my wings for tea, etc., etc.”

Again, like all passionate natures she had a horror of gush and sentimentality, not to speak of sycophancy and certain other qualities that seem to flourish in the soil of courts. Betty remembers a characteristic outburst of hers at — Cottage. Someone was fingering the piano, and suddenly a well-known mellifluous clerical voice was heard murmuring outside the window : ‘ As I came up the drive

I fancied I caught the sweet strains of an Erard.' Instantly from behind a curtain where Lady Ponsonby was writing, came in exasperated *sotto-voce*, 'Tell him it's a Stinkheim.'

Another quality of hers must have militated against universal popularity; no one suffered fools less gladly. If craftsmen she employed were liars, drunkards, thieves, or, as a maid of hers said of the carpenter, 'a mask of immorality,' she didn't mind in the least provided they were clever at their job; but with stupidity she had no patience. In all closed communities stupid people abound and flourish like the green bay-tree, but such could not look for Christian tolerance from Lady Ponsonby. Not of course that she would be unkind, let alone rude, but they would be skilfully kept at a distance.

Hence I daresay some people may have failed to perceive wherein lay the fascination of which they heard so much. But every single soul she liked and cared to attract, all her old friends, most of them now dead and gone, like the Cornishs of Windsor, Arthur Benson, and Edmund Gosse; others who are still with us, not to speak of all her surviving relations, would not only subscribe to the appraisal here attempted, but would bear me out in saying that she was one whose infinite variety custom was powerless to stale.

Such are not easy to portray. Yet at this moment I am realising for the thousandth time since her death, that to evoke her image is to marvel afresh at the undimmed warmth with which the colours glow. Just as in the company of her children, or of relations who were specially dear to her like Maurice Baring and Elizabeth Kenmare, I have often asked myself, 'Who lives on as she does in the lives of those who in a certain sense have lost her?'

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During the last four years of her life I only saw her intermittently. In 1911 I got involved soul and body in the frantic fight for the vote, and in 1913 came my 'Flight into Egypt'—sole hope of struggling out of the suffrage

whirlpool and getting back to music (which Mrs. Pankhurst and I had always agreed should be done as soon as my two years of militancy were absolved). And then, while I was returning to England in 1914, war broke out.

Lady Ponsonby, who at that time was eighty-two, had at last begun to age, but she still was what she had always been for me—the incarnation of a certain divine song of Schubert's ¹ in which the poet, speaking of the glory of the dying day, promises God that even as the earth, as long as the sun is above the horizon, draws heaven to her bosom, so will his heart, until it finally crumbles to dust, drink in warmth and light.

After my return I only saw her occasionally, for almost immediately I took up radiographic work, first in Italy and then in France. But mercifully in September 1916 I returned to England for a few days and learned from Betty that her mother was very, very ill, and that though of course I could come over I must not count on seeing her. Her spirit, so it appeared, was the same as ever, and only that morning, while Betty, thinking she was dozing, was reading the newspaper, a voice from the bed suddenly remarked, 'Don't read *The Times* with that reverend face.' I went in for two or three minutes, but she had a temperature, so I only kissed her dear hands, gave her, to her evident pleasure, a message from Maurice, who was at the front, said I would come again when she was better, and went away—knowing full well I had seen her for the last time. Less than a week later she died.

For the sake of completeness I have carried the story to the end of her life ; but, as was stated farther back, it was only in the autumn of 1892, just where I dropped and now propose once more to take up the autobiographical thread, that our real friendship began. So 'the best is yet to be.'

¹ *Im Abendroth*, Schubert Album (Peters), Vol. II, No. 67.

Meanwhile all the time I have been writing this little monograph I have been asking myself, 'What shall be the last word?'

And now an idea has come to me of which I think she would approve although from modesty she might dispute its appropriateness. Or, if not from modesty, then from spirit of contradiction—a well-known Grey characteristic, in fact a family tradition upheld by no one more gallantly than by Mary Elizabeth Ponsonby. Without asking his permission, I will venture to apply to his father and mother words written by their youngest son Arthur about the diarist John Evelyn and his wife—another Mary.

'They were neither of them great in the generally accepted sense of the word. But perhaps they were greater than the great. Perhaps by their ceaseless endeavour, their wonderful purity of motive, their almost instinctive resolve never to abase their standard, their sustained effort to turn the passing hour to good account, and their constant pre-occupation to help others, they may have set in motion those little currents of influence hidden from the eyes of men, yet reaching further than mortal man can grasp—not only in their own day but to the years beyond.'

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In Memoriam
FREDERICK PONSONBY

(LORD SYSONBY)

died Oct. 20, 1935.

Many months have passed since I wrote the above, and now one more of Lady Ponsonby's children, one not yet on the threshold of old age, is gone ; he whom I used to call 'Fritz of Deloraine,' because it would be the natural

impulse of all who knew him to turn in time of need to this wisest of advisers, this kindest and most resourceful of friends.

The other day his brother Arthur, who had been going through his papers, wrote to me, ' We shall never get to the end of all the people he seems to have helped *without anybody knowing* ' . . . wherein he was the son of his father. For myself, not to speak of many other occasions, I will only say that in two grave crises of my later years—one concerning a sister of mine whose friend he was, one concerning myself—he literally staved off disaster.

I had been in constant touch with him all this last year. We felt alike about many matters, for instance our views on literary portraiture were identical, and the letter he wrote me when I sent him the just completed text of the above study of Lady Ponsonby will always be one of my most cherished possessions. While writing the rest of the book he was more in my mind than anyone else except perhaps Maurice Baring. Pervaded as were the years of which it is a record with his mother's presence, at every turn I would say to myself, ' That'll make Fritz laugh ! ' or I would hear him saying ' *How* like Mama ! ' . . . And now half the joy of putting forth the book is gone.

Yet even his passing shows once more how their mother lives on in the lives of her children. When he died I wrote to Arthur that this death has brought her back to me with renewed poignancy ; and replying he says : ' Of course it is the old days which come back to me most vividly—and, as you say, Mama, who is always there for me, *comes back still closer.* '

(Christmas 1935.)

CHAPTER VII

(AUTUMN 1892)

HARDLY was I back again in England, trying to get over the rather upsetting effect of Bayreuth and settling down to *Fantasio*, than a letter arrived from Sir Henry Ponsonby whom I scarcely knew, saying that he had spoken to the Duke of Edinburgh about the Mass and that His Royal Highness had told Mr. Barnby that it was to be on whatever date I preferred. Barnby and I then met, and as the concert of January 18 suited the Empress Eugénie admirably, that date was fixed. Later I found out that, as I suspected, this was really the work of Lady Ponsonby ; and when I asked her why she had done it, her reply was, ‘ Because I liked you ! ’

And now, I, the obscure, suddenly found myself becoming, in anticipation, a star of some quite humble magnitude (say the seventh or eighth) and was requested to accord interviews, to which, in my innocence, little knowing how they would come out at the other end, I gladly consented. Thus in due course I found myself reported as having said among other remarkable things that ‘ I composed as the birds sing.’ So green was I that a sarcastic little letter was fired off at the editor of that paper asking if his reporter would kindly state what birds are able to take part in a four-part fugue, and I was much disappointed to find this effusion ignored. To another interviewer, who began by quoting with gusto the supposed remark about the bird, I

stated that composing was more like a cook making a pie (which is true). But this remark was omitted in the report and very soon the delight and novelty of being interviewed died a natural death.

As further proof that my stock was rising came an invitation from Col. and Mrs. Eddy Stuart Wortley to their lovely place, Highcliffe, near Christchurch—once the home of his wonderful aunt Lady Waterford—to meet the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. I had known Eddy Wortley for some years, and though I always got on better with women than with men, there was a certain type of man whom I found in so far attractive that I should vaguely have liked to sit on his knee, though, as I truthfully informed Harry, this was the limit of my inclinations. Of such cases I can only recall two or three, but Eddy was one of them, and though by that time some campaign or other had damaged his complexion and rather impaired his beauty, he was still very personable. Then it was so odd and nice of him to like me, for I wasn't 'smart' and that was supposed to count for him above everything else. His wife I knew less well but liked, so I looked forward immensely to this visit, but determined—a case of now or never—first of all to pay my respects to Uncle and Aunt Charles Brodrick Scott, who, as readers of 'Impressions that Remained' may remember, had played such a great part in our lives when we were children. She, a cold, austere, very cultivated woman, was my father's youngest sister, and her husband (and first cousin) was in those days Headmaster of Westminster. Alas! like so many scholarly and derelict Church dignitaries who had failed to become bishops, he was now stranded with his wife at Bournemouth.

They were a childless couple, my aunt was paralysed and could not speak, and the life of this immensely learned divine had taken the all too familiar turn of leading about by their noses a bevy of elderly, devout, and admiring spinsters. His natural temperament was affectionate and

parsimonious—tendencies apt to increase when you are old and have nothing particular to do, and which are illustrated in the only two scenes from that lugubrious little curtain-raiser to Highcliffe that I still recall.

Scene I. It is breakfast ; the hot things consist of one tiny bit of fish saved from last night's dinner, and, placed exactly between me and Uncle Charles, one boiled egg. I wait till he is scouring the sides of the marmalade pot with the spoon and say : ' If you are not going to eat that egg I may as well have it.' Upon which, snatching it up, he says : ' My dear child, there is no necessity for either of us to eat the egg,' and dumps it down on the far side of the table. Next morning, as before, one egg, probably the same, appeared, but this time, saying nothing I seized and ate it first thing. It was not very fresh.

Scene II. Uncle Charles invited three old maids to tea. They were sisters and I was told that the youngest, Miss Hester, was exceedingly bright and intelligent. When they arrived he paid not the slightest attention to the other two but at once embarked on sprightly clerical chaff with Miss Hester. For reasons of economy the room was very dark, lamps never being brought in till leg-breaking stage had been reached—but I gathered that Uncle Charles was explaining to Miss Hester how to kneel without discomfort on the wooden ledges in the new church. ' Your knee-cap,' he said, ' must project over the edge . . . look here, give me your hand.' There was a little scuffling and out rang the high clear voice of Miss Hester : ' Yes . . . one has a knee.' ' Oh, very well,' said my uncle, ' you can of course illustrate the matter with your own knee, but you might just as well have done so with mine.'

My unfortunate aunt, whose room was next door, was liable to sudden fits of hysterical weeping—very, very loud and absolutely uncontrollable—and at this precise moment sounds of such an attack suddenly penetrated the none too solid walls of the villa with really sinister effect. . . .

I cannot say with what relief I said good-bye next day, and tuned myself up for the beauties and elegancies of Highcliffe, which more than came up to expectation, though the chief detail I remember about it was travelling back to Farnborough in the Royal special train—the first time this high experience had come my way.

The Duchess of Connaught was then a young bride, terribly shy, consequently stiff and at first rather alarming; but sudden warm little unbendings prepared you for the discovery that, as her Lady in Waiting Lady Elphinstone subsequently told my father, she was ‘one of the most lovable people in the world.’ Later on, when I came to know her well I once said to her: ‘Ah, Ma’am, if you were not a Royal Highness I think we should have been friends,’ and when she asked why being a Royalty should interfere with friendship, I expounded the doctrine concerning Royal Personages treated in a former chapter.

This daughter of the German ‘Red’ Prince Charles had been brought up with the utmost simplicity, and she would not then believe that becoming one of our Royal Family need change anything; but later on she used to say rather sadly, ‘Yes, it *does* make a difference.’ Yet if any Princess ever remained as normal a human being as was possible under the circumstances it was she. Sincere, direct, warm-hearted, she belonged to the genus I so greatly admire, the temperamental; and when she died (alas! so untimely) all who knew her must have felt that there was one glowing fire less in a chilly world.

That autumn, I am glad to say, relations between me and Mrs. Benson were resumed on a somewhat easier footing than before. No doubt this was partly owing to Arthur Benson’s kindly efforts of conciliation, but partly, I cannot help thinking, because rumours must have reached her through Arthur, who was a great friend and admirer of Lady Ponsonby, of my nascent friendship with one whose

reputation for brains, level-headedness and catholicity—tempered, it is true, with fastidiousness—in the choice of her friends, was as well known to Mrs. Benson as to everyone else. Certain it is that little things of that kind do sometimes make people pause and wonder if they have not perhaps judged a fellow mortal unfairly. Besides which I daresay that no longer harried by visits and letters from her storm-raising friend, she had leisure to reflect—as I had often reflected—that throwing up the sponge in the way we had done was rather a reflection on the Christian charity and self-control of our Head Shepherd. Anyhow, when my great German friend Lili Wach, youngest daughter of Mendelssohn the composer, came to England, Mrs. Benson thought that since she and Lili had long desired to meet, and since the Archbishop placed the *Elijah* on a twin pinnacle with the *Messiah*, another meeting might perhaps be risked.

I rather wondered afterwards if the celebrated Addington *fracas* had been referred to, and a hope expressed that nothing of the sort would happen this time ; just as in his cantankerous old age I would tell my big dog Marco that the piano tuner was coming and there must be no repetition of previous scenes with that timid functionary. If so, as in the case of Marco, the recipe worked like a charm, for anything more perfect than the Archbishop's courtesy towards my friend, and more pleasing than his stately affability towards myself, cannot be imagined. On a later occasion that same year, Maggie confessed afterwards that the ground *had* been carefully prepared beforehand, with the happy result that at one moment His Grace was to be seen on his knees at my feet, explaining photographs connected with the Assyrian Church. Nor was my gratification seriously marred by noticing that general conversation had languished at the sight, while solemn winks were being exchanged between Mrs. Benson and other members of the family. And though we agreed that the experiment must

not be often repeated, as far as it went 'it was a glorious victory.'

But the development of the bond with H. B. and the dawn of my friendship with Lady Ponsonby, these two relations being the mainspring of my emotional and intellectual life during the years that followed, dwarfed everything else. Harry was at Rome and I was deep in correspondence with him about the libretto of *Fantasio* and otherwise hard at work on it, for Levi had urged me to enter it for some continental competition ; none the less I managed to snatch occasionally glimpses of Lady Ponsonby, and I remember that Maggie P. (as I shall call her to distinguish her from Maggie B. *alias* Benson) came to stay with us at Frimhurst, for I remember my father saying to her, 'I assure you, Miss Ponsonby, I have been trying for forty years to get a word in and have never succeeded.' Which was in part true, for besides his delightful liability to 'Spoonerism' ('coqs à l'âne') he was a little slow off the mark sometimes, therein not resembling his children.

Maggie was superlatively amusing and the best of good company. A wonderful mimic, she was mistress of an astonishing vocabulary and would improvise long æsthetic exordiums in the style of certain of her mother's intellectual friends that were so nearly all right, so exactly like the high-flown pronouncements that some of them, notably Vernon Lee, were apt to release on all occasions, no matter to what unworthy listeners ; and such discourses would be dotted about with such absolutely probable-sounding words, invented on the spur of the moment, that it was only with difficulty one realised it was sheer rubbish. In fact this gift of Maggie's amounted, if I may be exonerated from profanity, to a sort of lay Pentecostal Inspiration. Further, she was devoted to children, and certain anecdotes she told of one particular child reinforced an impression I had already gained from Princesses Louise and Tora, that

within the walls of Windsor Castle dwelt one of the most delightful little boys in the world.

I have not the pleasure of the Marquis of Carisbrooke's acquaintance, but cannot conceive that the gravest, most reverend signior in the world (or, if the Marquis is a soldier, several Field Marshals rolled into one) could possibly object to anyone knowing that as a child he exhibited a fantastic imaginative strain that one supposed was due to his Polish blood. When I told the Empress Eugénie about it she remarked, as well she might : ' On l'en débarrassera bien vite à Eton, le pauvre gosse.' .

Living, as ever, remote from the great world, I do not know if this prophecy was fulfilled ; indeed the sole glimpse I ever had of ' Drino,' as they called him, was one day at Cumberland Lodge where the children, who had been invited to spend the afternoon, had been dropped by the Queen and were rather in disgrace because of a scene that had occurred on the way. Little Princess Ena, after gazing fixedly at her grandmother for a minute or two, had suddenly asked her whether old ladies ever marry again and get young and pretty, and was told not to be impertinent. ' Were *you* ever impertinent ? ' asked the child, whereupon the Queen boxed her ears and Windsor Park echoed with rapidly stifled howls.

After tea we all played hide-and-seek, and at one moment Princess Tora had to soothe and reassure her small cousin as to a regrettable incident in the cupboard where she had hidden him under his uncle's great coat. None the less there were occasional fresh and tearful outbreaks of ' Oh, aren't I a dirty boy ! Whatever will Uncle Christian say ! ' While kind Princess Christian remarked in a whisper : ' What else could you expect after such an agitating drive with dear Mama ! '

Little Drino used to call Maggie ' Lady Funny ' (' I can't call you Miss Maggie,' he declared), and I wish I could remember all his sayings ; how one day he called out as

she stepped on to the grass, 'Don't walk there! The little primroses are coming out,' and again how driving home one evening he remarked: 'It's all very well now when there are only two or three stars, but when the rest come out it must be hard work for God to hold them up.' Another story came from Princess Louise who was hearing the children say their prayers one night, and said she couldn't give Drino a chocolate as he had been so naughty all day; he had better ask God to make him a better boy. 'Does God do everything you ask Him?' asked Drino. Slightly nonplussed Princess Louise rashly said 'Yes!' whereupon he jumped out of bed, flumped down on his knees with 'Please God make Drino a good boy,' and jumped up again saying: 'God has made me a good boy now, so please may I have the chocolate?'

Evidently he meditated a good deal on religious subjects and one day asked the Queen if Jesus Christ was a gentleman. 'What *do* you mean, dear?' asked the much astonished Queen. 'Well, you see,' was the answer, 'He was born in a stable.' And the origin of evil must also have pre-occupied him, for one day he explained at lunch that it was not his fault when he was naughty, it was the 'serpent man' (?) who came and made him a bad boy. At this moment the footman dropped some plates: 'There!' said Drino, 'James didn't *mean* to drop those plates, it was the serpent man that made him.'

Such are the clouds of glory mortals trail after them in early youth, though later on they get rid of them and become like my father, who, when there was a crash at the side-table, was apt to call out angrily: 'God gave you two hands and why the devil can't you use them?' How astonished he would have been if the footman (late of the Battenberg establishment) had replied: 'Please, sir, it was the fault of the serpent man.'

That autumn I had an infuriating little experience

belonging in the category we used to call 'silly pity,' the inventor of this phrase being Edith Davidson, who when told that the curate of some Windsor church was flirting with the doctor's wife, had merely remarked 'What a silly pity !'

Our beloved old friend Sir Evelyn Wood, now a widower, was in command at Aldershot, and his very warm affection for me was based on three facts : (1) That he had known me as a child ; (2) that being a desperately hard worker he recognised the same quality in others and was really interested in my music life ; (3) that we occasionally met out hunting with Garths foxhounds or the Knaphill Harriers and that he approved of my style of going. Being exceedingly enthusiastic, innocent, and unworldly (also very deaf, which tempts one to hold forth from altruistic motives, in order to spare others the bother of raising their voices) the report that we were engaged arose and spread in the most astonishing fashion, one friend writing to congratulate my sister from the Shetland Isles !

I myself had heard nothing about it, but one day two incidents struck me as odd. I had been lunching at Government House, and afterwards we played tennis. It was rather hot, and I first took off my flannel jacket, and then my woolly. 'Take care, dear,' Sir Evelyn cried out, 'you're thinking of C sharp and D flat and mayn't know where to stop !' As I have never been able to see why one should not appreciate one's own jokes as well as other people's, I take no shame in quoting what I think was rather a good retort. 'Don't be afraid,' I bawled across the net, 'I shall stop before I get to E natural !' But instead of laughing, or even smiling, his daughter Totsie remained preternaturally grave.

After tennis we all set out on foot for Farnborough Hill, walking through the Empress's wood which she had christened 'Compiègne,' and I could not make out why Totsie clung like a limpet to her father's arm all the way. The path

was very narrow, and as Sir Evelyn kept turning round to address remarks to me and couldn't hear my answers, I was constantly obliged to hop forward and wade in the mud at his other side.

Next day someone told me about this absurd rumour. I loved Sir Evelyn and hated the idea of degrading gossip touching our relation, so I at once rode over to Government House and had it out with Totsie, explaining as well as such things can be explained to a dear wild Irish girl aged seventeen, that rather than marry any man alive I would hang myself on the flagstaff that dominated Government House. Asked what she would like me to do about it, Totsie wondered if I would mind writing to a certain aunt of hers, who was a worldling, a terrific gossip, and who would thoroughly enjoy scotching the lie. I did so, and why Totsie and all the family (including their dear confessor Father Brindle) considered this 'a noble action' on my part I could not understand—unless perhaps they thought many girls would cling to an even lying rumour of such an honour having been paid them as an 'offer' from Sir Evelyn! Meanwhile, in order to explain the family's agitation at the report, Totsie went on to say: 'You see we were so afraid it might come to the ears of the Queen and damage the pater's prospects.'

Now, noble or not noble, I rather resented this view of an alliance with me, and to her intense amusement told the Empress about it. She said that she also had heard the report, and as both Sir Evelyn and I were recovering from sprained knees just then, had been indulging in a vision of our sitting up side by side in a large four-poster, arguing about conscription, the calibre of heavy artillery, or some such topic. None the less she had assured everybody that it must certainly be a *canard*, and as for Totsie's remark, she explained that the Queen disapproved so highly of second marriages as almost to look on them as a breach of the seventh Commandment! After which, my

vanity soothed, I dismissed the matter from my mind, and continued as before to fight Sir Evelyn when he claimed points unlawfully at tennis, which Totsie declared had looked so very suspicious, as no one else dared to drop on the pater when he cheated ! But I wouldn't let him off for all that, and his invariable answer was : ' *Not out ? All right, dear, have it your own way.*'

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One of the delights of enjoying the freedom of Farnborough Hill was easy contact with people of varying nationalities such as you seldom meet in the country, some of whom were amusingly out of place in an English landscape. That autumn a succession of particularly attractive people visited the Empress, to more than one of whom I could but take violent if fugitive fancies. This trait used greatly to astonish the Empress, and once when I said that to give and receive all sorts and kinds of affection was as necessary to some people as variety in meat and drink, ' *L'affection !*' she said, ' *pour moi c'est une corde inerte !*'

I thought this one of the saddest remarks I ever heard, and to-day it seems to me sadder still ; for reading a deeply interesting book recently published by her great nephew the Duke of Alba, ' *Lettres Familiales de l'Impératrice Eugénie*,'¹ it is easy to see that, when young, what she craved for above all things was affection ! But when they were spoken the words were only too true, for unutterably good as she was to everyone, the prompting force was sheer kindness, not affection.

Her word '*engouement*,' which is of course the ordinary French word for passing fancies, was unconsciously adopted by us ; and my brother-in-law Herbert Hollings, who, though matter of fact, was endowed with a rich subterranean vein of humour, remarked one day : ' I heard the other night a French word mentioned at least ten times at dinner, and again to-day at lunch, and I don't know what it means,

¹ I am glad to hear this book is being translated into English.

unless, as I gather, it is the thing Ethel has at such frequent intervals for so many different people.'

The Empress's masculine visitors seldom stayed more than a day or two ; she had no shooting, and with a visit to Aldershot or the Staff College the resources for a male guest were pretty well exhausted. Perhaps some of the more brilliant members of the Bonapartist clan had made terms with the Republic and could not very well put in an appearance at Farnborough Hill, but such men as did come produced the impression of people who had been brought up under the shadow of defeat, and whether from loyalty or laziness were out of the running. None were in any way striking except two quite young ones who used to come a great deal in later years, and whom the Empress used to call '*les enfants de la maison*' ; Lucien Daudet, son of the famous novelist—who himself took to literature and wrote an exquisite memoir of the Empress, called '*L'Inconnue*'—and Count Joachim Clary, son of the ex-Master of the Horse, who became a very great friend of mine and thanks to whom, years and years afterwards, '*Impressions that Remained*' came into existence. I have told the story in the Preface to the cheap edition of that book, but for love of Clary should like to tell it again.

In 1917 I was in Paris, blending war work in the radiographic department of a French military hospital with daily visits to an aurist, and twice a week I used to dine alone with this friend, who, when first I knew him, was a clever, good-looking, active, rather spoiled youth, and who now, at the age of forty, was a cripple, his limbs twisted and gnarled with arthritis, in constant pain day and night, and totally blind. Yet such was his originality, his culture, his unconquerable sense of humour, and above all his superb courage, that his friendship was still, as ever, one of the assets of my life.

One evening, when I had been recounting some absurd childish adventures, he declared that these experiences, so

typically English and yet already so remote, would be well worth writing down and exactly the sort of thing to read to an invalid after dinner. I set to work, and thus chapter by chapter 'Impressions' came into being. Before it was finished he died, and on the card announcing his death were quoted words, taken from St. Bonaventure, that I imagine all of us would be glad to deserve, as Clary did, when our time comes : ' Il a été vaillant dans la douleur ; dans ses souffrances il a conservé la patience ; jusqu'en face de la mort il a gardé son sourire.'

But if the men did not linger long at Farnborough, their wives and daughters (the Empress adored the young of both sexes) and plenty of other women, for the most part relations of the hostess, were only too delighted to put in a restorative week or two of English country air ; and among those who turned up every autumn was a very great artist—widow of the late Emperor's physician and a well-known amateur contralto at the Tuileries, Madame Conneau. Her voice reminded you of all soft deep instruments in the world and her soul was as beautiful as her voice. Enormously stout, at Paris she dieted severely. But the Empress's chef was almost as great an artist in his line as Madame Conneau in hers (anyhow at that time, for later on he fell off, and explained, to Madame le Breton's indignation, that 'à la campagne tout le monde baisse'). Consequently at Farnborough Hill Madame Conneau declared she would adopt a new régime : ' Ici je mangerai et je boirai tout, à tort et à travers.' And the Empress, the least greedy of women, was torn between a desire to check this rashness and the dictates of hospitality.

Then there was a diaphanous Italian, Marquise de C. F., all mental and physical sinuosity, floating veils, face-powder, and broken heart, who informed me she was writing memoirs, to be burned after her death, in which were 'des choses inouïes . . . terribles !' When not

flirting in the most barefaced and cheerful manner she would asseverate 'Tout est fini pour moi ; je ne pense qu'à la mort,' and if there was a fine sunset and you were rash enough to remark on it she would say, 'Dieu, que c'est beau ! . . . Ah ! . . . que ça me fait mal' and so on ; then if a man strolled up, she instantly re-became a slender Lilith in widow's weeds. What astonished me was to note that all these moods were genuine as far as they went, only no Englishwoman would have the face to trot them out one after the other with that bewildering facility.

This Italian charmer was balanced by a really witty and fascinating Frenchwoman—the one who called the Anglican Church 'l'église Catholique Apostolique Anna Boleyme.' She had a curious story. Having got rid of her husband for reasons admitted in her Church as justification for annulling marriage, she would neither divorce him nor use his name, preferring to take back her own patronymic (martially a very distinguished one) and call herself 'Mademoiselle.' This infuriated her great admirer, Madame le Breton. I remember that violent old lady banging the table and exclaiming before everyone : 'Mais ma chère c'est absurde ! . . . vous avez couché sous les mêmes draps, et votre mari a fait ce qu'il a pu !' With this young lady I had an ardent friendship that lasted I think less than three months ; for she was capricious and tyrannical—traits that manifested themselves in early life when her celebrated father was Governor of one of the French colonies. A high wall was being built round the grounds, and she, a child of seven, absolutely refused to go out by the main gateway, declaring she wanted to have a little entrance for herself. And when the good-natured workmen had knocked out one for her she remarked : 'C'est bien ! maintenant j'entrerais toujours par la grande porte.' And judging by her subsequent history, her elderly and adoring parents had refrained from smacking her head.

Another annual visitor was a really remarkable woman,

the young Duchess of Alba, wife of the Empress's only nephew, and mother of the present Duke (then at school in England—later on the beloved 'Jimmy,' cherished guest throughout the whole of the English great world, who, during the last government but one before the Spanish Monarchy fell, was Foreign Minister). Rosario Alba was simple, straight, and lovable as are all her children—now middle-aged men and women—and a *grande dame* by nature, because naturally kind, thoughtful for others, and absolutely mistress of her own soul ; in fact of the same breed as the best type of Englishwoman, though Spanish blood alone ran in her veins. A great sportswoman, she was the first woman who ever rode at the head of the bulls that were being driven in from the country for the bull fights—a dangerous and wildly exciting thing to do. For as the bulls, led by a couple of horsemen and one heifer, near their destination, maddened by their own pace and an instinct that something tremendous is on foot, they gallop faster and faster, and if one of the fore-riders or his horse makes a mistake the result is a shambles.

Another thing about this most genuine of characters was her complete absorption in anything she was doing, tennis, hockey, hunting, or editing the priceless Alba papers which she found lying about pell-mell in boxes at their palace at Madrid, and which included twenty-two letters from Columbus, and the original Bull from the Pope permitting him to divide the world between Spain and Portugal. These publications had a great success, after which the Duchess destroyed the type. A bibliomaniac and very learned, you never would have guessed it ; but one thing you knew for certain, that compared to her steadiness of purpose and reliability, Rocks of Ages would be quicksands.

Madame le Breton, who thoroughly appreciated her, remarked one day that she would inspire friendship but not love, and was always described as 'très bon garçon'—which one suspected this once beautiful old lady of nearer

eighty than seventy considered a pity. I thought of that remark in after years when Rosario, speaking of the Empress's utter incapacity for doing anything underhand (a trait the speaker had in common with her aunt), remarked that the French could never forgive her for not having gone the way of other women in that corrupt court. And when I said that at no time of her life could the Empress's temptations have lain in the direction of sentiment, let alone sensuality, 'Ah!' said Rosario, with particular emphasis, 'people always say that of women who keep straight!' And I rather fancied she was thinking of herself. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

(AUTUMN 1892)

TURNING over letters of that autumn, I was amazed to find that at this time I had been toying with the idea of writing an autobiography—a fact I had forgotten when I embarked, fifteen years later, on ‘Impressions that Remained,’ and which, in the course of writing this present sequel, was brought home to me by the following passages in a letter from Harry of the date November 30, 1892.

‘To write a good autobiography must be splendid exercise, morally—nothing needs such an effort at disinterestedness. Certain things have been felt and thought. If the author can render these vividly, as experiences that belong to the race, merely making use of his own figure as connecting link, nothing is more charming. They have a fervour and an inwardness that cannot be imitated. But if he falls into the mistake of many biographical authors and gives us information the only interest of which is that it concerns his hero, the effect is disastrous. It is as though he presented to a museum the cane-bottomed chair in which that hero had sat—which of course is not a whit more curious than any other cane-bottomed chair except in the eyes of what the French call *badauds*—people who will stare for a quarter of an hour at two pocket handkerchiefs exactly alike and buy the catalogue to see which was Charlotte Corday’s and which Mme. Roland’s.

‘You have lived with great intensity of feeling. If your past calls for utterance in words, jot down the scenes as

they come to your mind, looking at them like a spectator and painting in Ethel just as you do the other figures, with neither more nor less emphasis. You could make a good book of it.

‘In other words, the picture of the writer must result from his interest in the scenes or episodes he has lived through ; the scenes must not be constructed out of interest in that personage. But I am sure you know this as well as I do.’

I agree with every word of this but should like to add a rider. If, for instance, you sketch a few autumn scenes at Farnborough Hill, you may do it in the most impersonal and dispassionate spirit, yet what makes it seem worth while doing is the reaction on yourself, the person who wields the pencil. If wholly unaffected by the pose of the Marquise, the charm and capriciousness of the one-time wife of an unsatisfactory husband, and the really splendid quality of a third figure whose name links her back to England’s long, long struggle with Spain, there would be no point in attempting such a sketch. I think in short that one of the underlying ideas of autobiography, whether you are conscious of it or not, is an attempt at self-expression. There are plenty of other forces driving you along, but this is probably a strong one. And whether the proper place for the result is or is not the dustbin Time will decide.

At this moment of H. B.’s and my friendship, certain main lines of our respective characters and ways of tackling life began to emerge strongly, and the problem was how to smooth them out and work them somehow into the duet. As people are often attracted to their opposites, and as probably many young married couples, and many who find themselves caught up in some major adventure of friendship, have the same problem to tackle, perhaps one may be forgiven for dwelling on this matter.

In our case such conflicts were inevitable. Owing to

temperamental loneliness and the secluded life Harry had led from boyhood upwards—reinforced by the methodical segregation from humanity encouraged and even insisted on by Julia when they married—he seemed to me in some ways abnormally sensitive, or as in unfriendly moments I put it, *touchy*. I, on the other hand, one of a large family, was accustomed to giving and taking hard knocks. People who, though conceited and self-confident depend on approbation and affection, are called upon in the natural course of things to endure many a twinge of wounded vanity. But I had always made war on any traces of hypersensitiveness I detected in my own bosom, and looked upon it as part of sanity and human dignity not to dwell on these little rubs. The result was, an airy way of treating symptoms of that kind in others, which, in unfriendly moments, Harry called *brutality*.

Now as a rule he bore my diatribes and animadversions on various topics with amazing good humour. I would inform him that I liked men to be well dressed on the London model ; that one can *love* and feel the intensest feelings for a person no matter how they dress, but that to feel *in love* with people they must not only attract you physically but the jewel must be in a setting that appeals to you (*i.e.* Bond Street and Eddy Wortley !). That tastes differ ; for instance, for some women the Buffalo Bill style (than which, let me add, nothing was farther from my friend's) long hair, squashy hat, etc., has a strong appeal but not for me. I would urge that by nature Harry was a handsome man and I did wish he would give himself a chance and not stoop. I wished I could see him as a primitive Aryan—brown, hard, clear-eyed, as he could be if he chose. I underlined the fact that women have delicate senses and that though I never heard of men objecting to kissing in hot weather, most women do ; that like many healthy minded people I had strong reactions against the tyranny of loving, whether persons or things ; that no one

human being can satisfy all the needs of another, and so on, *ad lib.*

In various letters these points are raised, and his replies are so gentle, so wise, and sometimes so funny, that I cannot refrain from giving in the next Letter Section one complete battle-piece, characteristic of a campaign that went on more or less all our lives.¹

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In December I went to a small dinner party given by the Henschels at their home in Campden Hill. The guests were the Beerbohm Trees, Colonel Collins, who was Princess Louise's gentleman (the Henschels were great favourites at Kensington Palace), the Hippisleys, myself, and an unknown man whom from a photograph I at once recognised as Henry James. Looking like a Paolo Veronese figure, he detached himself from the other guests as though stepping out of a canvas, and introduced himself to me as 'a warm and admiring friend of Henry Brewster.' He sat by me at dinner and I found him one of the most delightful personalities and captivating talkers I had ever met, for in those days he had not acquired the habit which grew on him later of pulling up in the middle of a sentence and keeping you waiting for an indefinite time while he searched for the right word. When the word was obviously quite an ordinary one, you sometimes ventured to make a suggestion; for instance, were it a question of a lady who was walking through a wood with him and whose dress was caught by a . . . (*long pause*) you would suggest '*briar*.' The suggestion was ignored, and after another still longer pause out would come the word '*bramble*.' I believe this to have been part of his self-training as a writer, a reluctance to dash about recklessly with parts of speech lest his verbal instinct might be coarsened. Or it may have been a literary version of his habit (inaugurated by Mr. Gladstone) of masticating each mouthful twenty

¹ See Letter Section II, p. 160 *et seq.*

times before swallowing it. But people who only knew him as an elderly man could not believe that he once talked as freely as you and me, and with just as much distinction as in later days.

At dinner there was a great discussion as to how much right an executive artist has to depend on the inspiration of the moment. Henschel's contention, with which I absolutely agreed, was that an artist's effects should be conceived in passion but carried out in cold blood. This theory Tree warmly disputed, and Lili Henschel was amusing about a very tiresome sob-stuff play she had sat through a few nights ago, telling us how a certain popular actress who had played the heroine said afterwards that her own pathos had moved her so deeply that she had cried herself sick in the wings; 'Whereas,' declared Lili, 'I can guarantee that every eye in the house remained dry.' And though this anecdote told against his own theory, I was amused to note that Mr. Tree could not help rather gloating over the hit at another prominent stage figure!

At that time I was much given to singing a certain Home Rule song (words and music by Augusta Holmès) that Madame Conneau had introduced to me. A frantic anti-English outburst, fortunately it was written in French so that I was able to sing it at political meetings in Frimley (our home village) as an Orange song; and being musically of the fiercest brand, it always brought the house down. Now my singing was wholly untutored; I had never had lessons and, according to all real singers, produced my voice all wrong. This no doubt was true, but I didn't care a straw about that, not being a professional, and was bent on two things only: to make a pleasant noise, and to manage that every word should go straight home to my listeners—not a difficult thing to accomplish if you mean what you say and *accompany yourself*. In fact, as Lili would object: 'Ethel doesn't play fair, for she has it all her own way!'—a quite justifiable remark!

As a rule when real singers were present I did not lift up my voice, unless asked, which might easily happen among musicians, to sing something of my own. But that night someone specially demanded the Home Rule song ; and then more songs, after which the Henschels and some other singers who had dropped in took up the thread—and the Holmès song was sung again, I think three times. I confess it gave me pleasure when Mr. Tree, still smarting under Henschel's thrusts on the subject of art as opposed to nature, said to me with concentrated bitterness : ' It does me good to see how you with your *natural* singing triumph over these " *artists* " ! ' However—and I feel sure Mr. Tree must have known it—what creates a great effect in a drawing-room may well be no good at all in the concert room.

I seem to have been having a little social flare-up just then. Next night I went to a ' smart ' party given by a certain charming Mrs. Cecil Bingham who had far-apart eyes and a bewitching way of handling her eye-glasses. The Home Rule song was again in great request, and for once in a way it was rather fun listening to and parrying the infernal nonsense talked in that world about art. ' Only,' I added in a letter to Harry, ' I *do* wish I didn't wish I were well dressed ! '

CHAPTER IX

(AUTUMN TO CHRISTMAS 1892)

I WONDER if anyone can help me to trace a passage I once lit upon describing the spell cast by certain mountains. Probably it was in some mountaineering book, but the writer must have been a poet, and I remember he insisted that the lure did not depend on the difficulty of the climb, though no doubt that would be an element, but on all sorts of imponderables—shape, situation, colouring, *plus* something mysterious that pulls at you like a magnet and leaves you no peace till you stand on the summit.

The recollection of these pages often comes back to me when I reflect on the slow, difficult attainment of one of the longest, closest, most joy-giving relations of my life—that with Lady Ponsonby. Though, as related in a former chapter, after ‘Come o’er the Sea’ had paved the way she favoured our association and was always ready to provide chances of consolidating it, still many, many months were to elapse before I could count on becoming more in her life than a pleasant acquaintance whose singing she liked.

People who have a natural taste for books or pictures are pretty sure to end by learning a lot about painting or literature. In the same way those who depend much on human contacts generally arrive in this world with an eye for the make-up of human souls, which faculty time develops as it does other gifts.

Now I always felt certain, particularly after that passing

revelation connected with the death of her favourite sister, that affection, whether given or received, played a great part in my new friend's life ; yet, in her wise, steady acceptance of anything fate might decree, she had built such a triple fortress of detachment round herself, had such inexhaustible reservoirs of serenity to fall back upon, that it seemed likely she might not desire a new element in her existence. Indeed, even after one's foothold seemed secure, something in her engendered a feeling symbolised in my case by an absurd happening that often went with my short sojourns at Norman Tower. I would drop down into Eton, say to buy a packet of hairpins ; then, the purchase accomplished, tear up those terrible Hundred Steps as if a demon were after me . . . the demon being an insane idea that when you opened the door of her sanctum, the Prisons, you would find her vanished ! This in spite of the impression I said she produced of being settled in her chair with her book, immovable and content for ever and ever.

Several reasons might well account for reluctance to embark on the rather stormy enterprise that friendship with Edith Davidson's and Mrs. Benson's friend might turn out to be. Given her peculiarly close relations with husband and children, her vigorous, never flagging attention to every detail of housekeeping, and a specially warm affection for certain members of her family in the younger generation, her home life was very full. Then there were intimate friendships with interesting men and women—such as Arthur Benson and Mrs. Cornish, to mention two whom I knew well—and friends of Maggie's who were never defrauded of the charming welcome they counted on (again I think of a few well known to me, Freda Biddulph, Constance Lytton, and the Gleichens). Add to which her intellectual pursuits, her 'occupations,' and the occasional exigencies of Court life.

Once in early days she wrote to me : 'Just as you

determine that your work shall always be the strong spring in your life, so I intend that nothing shall interfere with the only work I *can* do, which is to make home life as bright and strong as I can, and avoid friction.' This was by no means a hint to me not to come butting in ; she knew how strong my feeling was about my own family, and that her handling of that part of her life was for me among her great charms. It was merely a reference to one of those disturbing chunks that fate often throws into smoothly revolving wheels, some difficulty she happened to be dealing with just then. Still, to work a new thread into a complicated pattern may not improve it and I often asked myself in dread why she should be asked to work in 'the contrapuntalist,' as they called me.

In this particular case, Maggie, already a little jealous, was certainly distrustful. Some years ago another woman a good deal younger than her mother, who had contrived to get through the usual defences, turned out to be an unreliable, treacherous friend, and little as Lady Ponsonby dwelt on that or any other emotional experience, I knew it had hurt her a good deal. Was this going to be the same story ? wondered Maggie, who with all her shrewdness was not a profound psychologist. She saw very sharply down to a certain depth, but not to the bottom of the sea, which, I think, is the only region that counts in friendship.

There again, as in the only previous relationship I had had that went as deep as this (that with Lisl a hundred years ago—but then I was a mere girl) my reputation for *engouements* was a stumbling-block, Lady Ponsonby being unable to conceive how deep and lasting feelings could be compatible with so many minor issues. That this should puzzle people has always puzzled me. Even when you are lost in ecstasy, having just discovered the Greek dramatists, who would think it odd that you should fall in love with Alfred de Musset or W. W. Jacobs ? But splendid

pagan though she was on the whole, in the region of the affections there was nothing of the pantheist about Lady Ponsonby.

I have always noticed that people who take fire slowly, or are constantly warned by an inward monitor not to let themselves go, have difficulty in understanding the temperament to whom it happens to wake up one morning and find Jack's beanstalk in their garden. How it got there you cannot conceive ; probably it had been growing for some time and only became visible when strong enough to carry a climber. The fact is, to leave fairy tales, some of us possess the faculty of getting at the essence before there has been time to acquire knowledge. Now in one well on in middle life character is set, and the essence, purged of passing phases, is more easily recognisable than in youth. Particularly was it so in her case. At fifty-nine you felt her soul had just arrived at the moment of maturity, and I soon ceased to deplore the waste years in which I had not known her, remembering Baudelaire's line about the Sphinx she so often reminded one of,

dont l'humeur farouche
Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se couche.

For my own part, graciously waved off into regions of amiable not very deep-going intercourse, I would console myself with the reflection that many things come to those who wait. And once you have felt the right key turning in the lock, even while it is being quietly and deftly withdrawn you cannot help believing that some day it will be allowed to open the drawer, and that then all will be well.

As regards Jack's beanstalk, of course I assume you are not unperceptive enough to idealise one in whose nature are ignoble strands, like cruelty or meanness, but short of that you may well make mistakes about details. If so, what matter? The salient fact is that such and such a one stands aloft on the pedestal of his or her personality,

and the constituent parts of it are of less importance than the towering.

Finally, another stumbling-block between me and my new friend was the H. B. affair. Not in the least because it shocked her, but I might almost say because there was nothing to be shocked about. She could understand clear issues; that people who love each other throw their caps over mills, or again that they should leave the whole thing alone as an insoluble problem—the attitude Mrs. Benson so strongly urged, though for strictly Bensonian reasons. But this odd plan of getting on with the job of friendship until the moment had come—if it ever should come—for the next step, puzzled her and made her take rather a dislike to H. B. ; a fact which would have distressed me had I not felt so certain that when she came to know him no one would appreciate him more.

For all these reasons to win her friendship was a difficult campaign. Yet hopeful little things would sometimes creep into her letters indicating that it was not only what she called my strongest card—my music—nor the increased sense of life, which is the essential part of friendship, that brought us together. She would write, for instance—the passage makes me laugh—that ‘instead of merely contradicting every assertion in your last letter which is not a platitude very well expressed,’ she would like to say ‘certain words that lie under the surface of my thought, but will not come flowing out of my pen as they do out of yours . . . *and how I should miss them if they didn’t!*’ Or again, once when I remarked in connection with some bit of newspaper science that pouring cold water on a flame sometimes stimulates it, she replied, ‘As pouring on cold water is, I fear, rather a habit of mine, I am glad to hear it may have unlooked for results.’

Yet what she gave with one hand she would take back

with another, writing, for instance: 'When you say these warm kind things they never seem poor or inefficient as they would in my case, because of the enormous amount of mental reservation which lies behind words written, yes, even behind words spoken by me.' Whereupon you would re-scan her letters and ask yourself, 'Did she really mean she would be sorry if one stopped saying "kind" things, or was there mental reservation behind that remark too? Would she merely accept the void and go on her own serene way?'

Either thing was possible, for no one gave a greater impression of dominating life. And yet in one of her letters I find these surprising words: 'Maggie has just told me I am one of the few people she has ever known who is never depressed, and if I pretended to be so it was a piece of acting. Well! to say "the acting must be rather good, but t'other way up" would be to talk of myself, which is one of the things to be met with an emphatic *no*. . . . What a powerful monosyllable that is, and what a temptation lies in its opposite . . . so rich and fraught with enjoyment . . . !'

'Oh, then,' one said to oneself, 'she is after all not so compact of serenity and nothing but that, as we all fancy. She does know what depression means . . . she does have to fight to keep her balance!' In a word, if in his obituary notice Arthur Benson spoke of her 'enigmatic glance' it corresponded to something in her soul. Hence, no doubt, much of her fascination.

In the course of my life I have learned one thing very thoroughly, though one has often forgotten it. It is that every latter-day friendship begins on the exact page at which the book of your two respective lives opened when first you meet. Perhaps you yourself may yearn for, and sometimes achieve, a certain knowledge of the other one's back numbers, but depend upon it that person will not evince the slightest desire to study yours.

I have often thought that Mrs. Baynham Badger—thrice married and apt to refer to her various husbands ‘as if they were parts of a charade’—was a fortunate woman in that when the reminiscent mood was on her, instead of crying ‘To hell with Captain Swosser, R.N., and Professor Dingo,’ Mr. Baynham Badger was never tired of running over and dwelling enthusiastically on the remarkable qualities of his predecessors. In fact the radiance of his wife’s ‘first’ and ‘second’ seemed to shed a special lustre on her ‘third.’ If you are built that way by all means pursue Mr. Baynham Badger’s methods, but do not expect reciprocity. It is quite useless, too, to pull out your own back numbers with a view to proving anything—for instance, that your dislike of calve’s head is no fresh vagary ; that on the contrary at the age of eight you were sent supperless to bed for having refused calve’s head at luncheon. No evidence will shake your new friend’s conviction that here is yet another food fad.

These reflections are engendered by coming across a letter from Lady Ponsonby, written when our friendship was well on in its second year, in which I find the following astounding remark : ‘I rather suspect you of gliding easily and gaily over the lumps and bumps of life, and of never having been in the bottomless pit. In fact I half suspect you are incapable of suffering.’

Now only a few months back my bachelor outfit had arrived from Germany, including a bundle of Lisl’s letters—eight years of them—which I had never dared to re-read. I now read one or two of them. It was like tearing out an everlastingly aching portion of the living body of one’s past. And because at that moment I could think of nothing else I wrote a letter—it is before me now—to Lady Ponsonby which is not exactly the letter of one to whom moral anguish is unknown ! None the less a few months later behold her writing : ‘I suspect you are incapable of suffering !’

The explanation is, I suppose, that at some moments

life beats so strongly in one's veins, and one is so happy, that people forget there is a dark side to the moon. Eventually it was what she called 'the strongest card in my suit'—my singing—that suggested other possibilities; would anyone who had always been wildly happy, she deigned to remark one day, put such and such an accent into such and such a song? (I think it was Schubert's 'Die junge Nonne.') Of course the deduction was all wrong. If you are capable of rendering the anguish that informs that song, all it means is that you are an artist and are passing on Schubert's anguish; but that sort of thing she would never have really understood; nor would most amateurs.

Though it was in the family tradition to go to Joachim's chamber music concerts, I do not know that she was really musical; again, in her youth all girls of her world were brought up to sketch from nature, so she painted, but it seemed to me as many amateurs do paint, just by way of an occupation. And when I remember that poetry said nothing to her, that verse actually bored her, I think one is justified in suspecting that though beauty in nature overwhelmed her, she was not richly equipped for the appreciation of art. Nevertheless a song sung in a certain manner could move her profoundly; and that broke down barriers more than anything else.

How funny she was about it! and how clearly one of the remarks she constantly made shows that the real problem of a creative artist was beyond her ken! For ever commenting on the disturbing way life reacted on her new friend, she would say: 'What I cannot understand is that you can sing the stormiest song of Brahms or Schubert with absolute control, and bring out all there is in it of turbulence and passion without ever wasting the substance of violence, your hand always on the helm. Why then is your life so tossed about and restless?'

I would explain that a song is one single, rounded-off

episode, its proportions settled to start with, and that to render it coherently is a very simple affair. Whereas your own existence is a long, confused, often desperate journey, about which only one thing is certain, that you are being dragged at the heels of a terribly strong master, your dæmon, and cannot choose your own path, let alone present as neat and composed an appearance as if you were got up for a garden party at Buckingham Palace. All of which went off her mind like water off a duck's back. And as she never heard (I think) any of my compositions, nor, if she had, would she have been capable of forming an opinion (notwithstanding which she would no doubt have formed one !) I never attempted to convert her.

.

I have dwelt at some length on the birth of this friendship, because if there is such a thing among human beings as a two-stringed instrument such as I once saw in an Arab band, for the next fifteen years I was that instrument and Harry and Lady Ponsonby were the two strings. Having established which point I will ask the kind reader to take it as running through the various tunes one was called on by fate to play.

That Christmas a Royal incident occurred which amused me a good deal. Great potentates who came to Windsor were apt to offer a memento to Sir Henry and add something for his wife ; but these presents were always refused, because, as she put it, he did not wish it to be supposed that the Queen's servants could be tipped like a butler ; in accordance with which principle some magnificent turquoises had recently been sent back to the Shah of Persia. Now Lady Ponsonby's sole passion in jewelry was turquoises, and this incident caused her such a pang, that when a beautiful carpet, offered by some other Eastern potentate, arrived, she begged Sir Henry to speak to the Queen before sending it back, pointing out that the

drawing-room at Norman Castle was badly in need of a new carpet.

Accordingly Sir Henry did speak to the Queen, explaining his reasons for always returning these presents. The Queen's reply was: 'I think you are perfectly right. *You might send on the carpet to me.*'

On Christmas Eve a memorable scene was staged on the platform of Farnborough Station. Maggie P. had been staying with us, and as her mother was starting that day for Osborne the Empress had the brilliant idea of getting our station-master to stop her train—a through express from Waterloo to Southampton—and pick up Maggie; and she also decided to walk down to the station herself and get a glimpse of Lady Ponsonby, who knew nothing whatever about these high plans.

As the train pulled up, Maggie and I tore off in opposite directions to find her mother's compartment, and, as usual, there she sat, static, as if bound for a journey round the world, immersed in her book. The scene that ensued was unforgettably comic. The Empress, obsessed as ever by the idea that English trains go off without giving warning, but none the less determined to salute the traveller, stood with extended arms at a safe distance from the carriage; Lady Ponsonby leaned out of it as far as she dared, firmly clutched (to her indignation) by Maggie, who had meanwhile got in, while Nina Hollings and I stood by, wondering how we could catch Lady Ponsonby should she fall out without upsetting the Empress. Having often listened to her remarks about 'English reserve' as manifested even in our locomotives, and her enquiries as to why they do not utter piercing shrieks before starting as they do abroad, we were able to gauge the heroism of her polite gesture.

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That Christmas was in some sort a *replica* of my mother's last Christmas on earth two years ago, when for the first



MRS. H. B. HOLLINGS (NINA) AND VIC

time the Henschels had come to Frimhurst. Then it was, that in order to reassure Lili Henschel, who with some trepidation had confessed to being a Unitarian, my genial father had remarked that some of the best men he had known in his life were Mohammedans. And why Lili and all of us laughed he could not understand.

Now again the Henschels were with us, and little did we dream that when another Christmas should come round my father would be lying stricken to death, so well, so cheery was he. I particularly recall the beauty of his reading of the lessons at Morning Service ; also that on the previous Sunday he had introduced an emendation of the text, informing the much astonished congregation that the punishment awarded to the Israelites in the desert for grumbling was a visitation of 'fiery flying pheasants' (serpents). His shooting days were over but evidently they still haunted him.

One of the Christmas letters was from my sister, Alice Davidson, who had been meeting Lord Roberts and had learned from him that after the Mutiny, Papa, who had been through it on the staff of his uncle, Sir Colin Campbell, was offered a post in England with which would have gone an appointment as *aide-de-camp* to the Queen. But he refused it, saying that his battery, a native one, having remained faithful, he would rather stay with it and confirm its faith. 'I thought that very remarkable,' added Lord Roberts. So did we, but when we asked him why he had thus acted he answered with his usual simple directness : 'Because I considered it my *dooty*,' and went on to declare that in those days it was the rule and not the exception to put that consideration before personal advancement. But if so, would Lord Roberts, a shrewd judge of men, have thought the decision remarkable ?

Our cross-questioning on this incident led him to do what he rarely did, talk about his youth and the conditions

at Addiscombe College, where young officers were trained for the forces of John Company. A couple of Sandhurst boys who were dining that night were much astonished to learn what a terrific amount of drill and hard study had to be got through on the following diet :

Breakfast. One cup of tea, one ounce of butter, and as much bread as they wanted.

Dinner. One cut of meat, carved by a corporal off a joint of which, at the end of the meal, nothing but the bone remained ; not one knob of fat, not one shred of skin. But as much admirable beer as they liked.

Supper. Same as breakfast as regards bread and butter, but instead of the miserable one cup of tea, again unlimited and excellent beer.

My father said most of them spent all their pocket money on solid food, generally brown bread and oysters, which were cheap. But what a diet for growing boys !

Henschel, like all German Jews (only he was really a Polish Jew), was much addicted to riddles and anecdotes, and one of his riddles greatly delighted my father though one would have thought it was rather off his usual beat. *Question.* 'Why cannot a deaf and dumb man tickle nine girls?' *Answer.* 'Because he can only just tickle eight' (gesticulate). A few days later one of us overheard Papa trying to pass on this conundrum to a boon companion. The question went with admirable precision, but his version of the answer was : '*Because he cannot articulate.*' In fact the riddle had eventually to be given up as too difficult to master ; indeed it is only with an effort that after forty-three years' reflection I can get it right myself.

Henschel's English was still highly individual, and I remember a remark of his on the way home from a village concert, to which, in spite of his pretty wife's objection to artists performing for nothing, he had good-naturedly volunteered to contribute. The flyman, far from sober,

took us now into the hedge on the right, now into the ditch on the left. At last Henschel opened the window and expostulated: 'But, my good man,' he asked, 'why do you drive on the most difficult parts of the road?'

A little incident between him and his wife, for whom my father had a blameless weakness, bequeathed to us a saying which to this present day is used by the surviving members of the Smyth Family Robinson on fitting occasions. Lili was relating how recently at a dinner party at the house of Sir George Lewis, the eminent solicitor, she had noticed that Paderewski was holding Lady Lewis's hand under the tablecloth. Henschel, who disliked scandal and wrongly thought my father might be of the same mind, tried to pooh-pooh the story, but Lili would not be denied and insisted: 'I tell you, George, I saw it quite distinctly; it was just when they were handing round the ice, and as I was only two places away . . .' At this point, raising his hand and speaking slowly and plaintively, Henschel ejaculated: 'Aber Lili, Lili! these are *not* the things which matter!' And even my father laughed at the tragedy he put into his voice.

I have said I am sensitive to speaking voices. In those days Lady Lewis had a voice like a corn-crake, and for many years because of it I avoided and rather disliked this wise, gifted, cultivated, and later on splendidly valiant woman, who at eighty-six was the best of company and whom I had come to love and admire. The year before she died, *i.e.* in 1932, I told her the 'Lili, Lili' story, and in her strong guttural voice, now a delight to me, she remarked: 'The story is not true . . . *unfortunately*.'

During the Christmas week Henschel was angelically helpful with the proofs and orchestral parts of the Mass, and it was decided that on January 16, the night before the performance, we were all to have dinner at his house; that is, my five sisters and their husbands, my father, and

also (though we did not think it necessary to spring the fact on the latter just yet) Harry, who was coming to England for the occasion. On previous visits he had made great friends with the hospitable Henschels, and this seemed as good an opportunity as any other to bang together those two very *disparate* heads, Harry's and my father's. But I was too deeply preoccupied with the musical aspect of the next three weeks to bother much about possible complications, whether sentimental or domestic.

LETTER SECTION II

(SEPTEMBER TO CHRISTMAS 1892)

(A)

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MRS. BENSON AND E. S.

E. S. TO MRS. BENSON.

October 16, 1892.

. . . I think the root of the trouble was that you were swept off your feet in the first instance by my need of intercourse with your natures (I speak of times after our first meeting and its causes) and put off recognition of mine. Nellie, by the by, recognised the difference of fibre, and perhaps later on she would have said 'We can't build up a sound friendship with such abysses of different fundamental views yawning beneath it.'

I remember a strange talk with her about my appreciation of risky jokes, if witty, and saying to her 'Remember, it is not because I am temporarily under bad influences; it is because the turn of my mind is what it is'—and she acquiesced and was grieved, but seemed inclined to chance it. I often wonder how it would have been had she lived.

. . . Strange to relate, most of those I strongly love and have loved hitherto, except H. B., are puritans, rigid formulators, exclusive natures altogether . . . and I am guilty in that it is always I who take the first step. If I had slipped into the position of 'outside patient' of yours all might have been well. But I wanted you—I wanted your civilisation. I recognised something real and strong by

which many live, and didn't feel an outsider because I knew I would love you enough to please a greedier person than yourself . . . but that was not enough for you. . . .

It is my fault, and I have often asked myself : ' Why choose for your nearest and dearest those who are less akin to you than anyone you know ? ' Ah ! it's just for that reason I want them ! But I allow I cannot complain if after all they can't swallow me. . . .

E. S. TO MRS. BENSON.

October 22, 1892.

. . . You say ' Why didn't you *act* as if you felt these divergencies you talk of, instead of merely *saying* this or that, *as I admit you did* ? ' What do you mean ? Is your present chilly disassociation of yourself from me what you called ' action ' . . . ?

I see you as I have always seen you, and love you as I have always loved you. True, the thing has not grown into what I expected ; as a rule if you love much and imagine you are loved, much intercourse ensues, but in our case this could not be, and very naturally we feel a certain sadness about it. But let me, just for once, say this. The reasons for which I love you are unshakable ; here are some of them ; your truth, your fire, your intensity, your power of sustained effort, your extraordinary grip over other souls, your intellect, and above all, in the words of a prayer I like, your ' unconquerable heart.' And playing on it all is the recollection of that firm hand in mine seven years ago . . . and the memory of Nellie !

Ah ! it is a puzzling world ! . . .

MRS. BENSON TO E. S.

October 24, 1892.

This is not an answer to your letter in any way but a desire has been in my soul some days now which somehow your letter makes me venture to express.

You know you have preserved absolute silence on your Munich experience nearly three years ago. Well, I am

going to press in on holy ground. But would it come natural to you to tell me in any way where it has led you? I am not the proselytiser you think. I wouldn't consent to live in a world where we all agreed. Himmel! No! But if you feel you could and would like . . . then I should like it more than I can say. We are in a mess, Ethel, but light will dawn.

[It was always difficult to me to talk about religious experiences, but I was deeply touched by Mrs. Benson's magnanimity and evidently did my best to tell the story of Christmas 1889 as described in 'Impressions.' My letter is not among those returned to me after her death; nor can I find one from her in which she appears to have told me I was quite wrong if I believed she preferred principles to persons.]

MRS. BENSON TO E. S.

October 28, 1892.

. . . Yes, I am *most* grateful to you for what must have been an intense effort, and it has told me a great deal, and more still in by ways; I mean I think I have grasped more than I ever did before of your shrinking from formulating in certain regions and at certain stages. . . .

Farewell and God keep you,

Yours,

M. B.

(B)

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN HENRY BREWSTER
AND E. S.

[As I indicated in the main text, page 127, I had written about the revulsion one sometimes feels from the slavery of things and people that count deeply in your life. Also about the independence of the animal instinct, other considerations playing little or no part. 'Sad but true,' I had said, 'there is something upsetting in knowing that if you are physically attracted it is often merely owing to propinquity.']

FROM H. BREWSTER.

[*Two theories of matrimony and an absurd book.*]

Nyon.

September 23, 1892.

. . . It is about ten days since I received your letter and nothing has happened in the meantime of any interest, except a performance last night at the theatre in Geneva of *Cedipe Roi* by the actors of the Théâtre Français. That is all I have to set against your Italian marquise and Mme. Conneau. My bursts of affection have to make me jump over some twenty-four centuries. I was quite startled to discover how wonderfully at home I felt among those people and how their prayers and hymns echo mine—or mine theirs. Probably we are all of us old-fashioned and conservative in some things ; and this is where my toryism comes in. I can't help it ; all that has been done in the way of religious thought since those days affects me like what I suppose your Duke of Cambridge would call new-fangled vagaries. You see there is nothing paltry or half-hearted about my conservatism. It has never digested the Jewish element.

But, apart from all this, is it not an admirable and touching thing that a man should write a drama to which we listen breathless somewhere between two and three thousand years after his death ? It is as though we saw into his eyes and found ourselves there.

I don't believe you will ever do that with your Italian hussy. I dislike her immensely. It is true that my acquaintance with her is slight. But from your description she seems to me just the sort of person in whom I would not invest more than I feel inclined to throw away—pretty much as one throws money on a gambling table ; even if one wins it is not for long, and the end of it all is the impression that the sunrise is a sweeter thing than gas and painted women.

I am sure your 'reactions from the tyranny of those you love' are not always of that kind. One may want to get away from persons or ideas or things without their

assuming the character of gas and painted women in one's eyes. (Do you recollect saying in your letter that you have violent reactions from the tyranny of the persons or things you love? Also that no one is or could be all you want?) Well, I can sympathise with these reactions; have them myself—though rarely as regards persons, because persons and I don't amalgamate easily—in so far as they mean that we need different kinds of food, and that we have a lazy tendency to go on too long with the same kind.

And in the same sense I agree that no one is or can be all we want. But these reactions are not of the same nature as those that ensue on bad mushrooms for instance. We shall want our coffee again to-morrow though nothing would induce us to take more of it to-day; but the mushrooms we have had enough of once for all.

Everybody agrees about this and no one I suppose expects one person to be all in all to another except newly married German girls for whom such songs are written as 'Hauptmann's Weib.' These certainly are as you say 'natures all on one line.' But if we try to read a meaning into the badly-worded gospel according to which one person ought to satisfy all another one's wants (the gospel of matrimony if you please! listen with maidenly respect) it must be that the two have some work in common such that each one's full and complete activity serves that work, tends to promote it; it is a confederacy of results, not of means; affection for other people may count among those means—and vagabond enthusiasms and 'passionnettes' as well as true friendships. The only question is how do they affect the total Her or Him with regard to the total Him or Her. If both of them spontaneously make this question the test, and unconsciously judge their own conduct by it, the gospel is suitable to them, however much they may quarrel over ways and means in their hours of unintelligence.¹

Such is the first chapter of the gospel. The second is like unto it but not quite so pleasant; for the first concerns only ways of feeling, the second ways of living—the

¹ Such were the lines on which the Brewster marriage was based.—E. S.

institution. As soon as it comes to that, sacrifice begins on both parts and the restriction of individual freedom. It is the cost of passing from psychical to social realities. Only I think that what alleviates the sacrifice for intelligent people is a great sympathy for the social body, which must be part of their stock in trade, so that their sacrifices are not made as from one to the other (which would be in direct contradiction to Chapter I) but from each of them to certain ideals of the community. A. and B. can have an understanding between them such that it is only promoted by A.'s being as completely and fully A., and B.'s being as thoroughly B. as possible. But if they cease to be A. and B. in order to become 'the firm A. B.,' then the law of firms is upon them ; they have applied for admission into a corporation and they must submit to its rules—not to one another.¹ They, or one of them, may be forced into breaking or eluding these rules, but it is like plunging from the air of a warm friendly room into the blackness of space where stars are few and far between. Only sheer necessity can warrant the leap.

I wonder if you agree to this commentary of your proposition that no one can meet all your demands? Don't forget to tell me—not in an off-hand way but very conscientiously.

Your letter broaches another interesting theme that has some reference to this one—don't imagine though that I have jumbled the two. It is about the independence of the animal instinct. If you favoured Mrs. and Miss Benson with this view, which is a perfectly true one, I can understand their dismay. It is an un-feminine view. Women are not supposed to be analytical creatures like men ; their faculties are not divided ; everything is all of a lump with them ; the man they dislike is necessarily a bad man whom they would unhesitatingly send to prison ; and the man who rouses their passion must necessarily be the one they worship. Otherwise great is the scandal. And I don't say

¹ This was the new position taken up by Julia throughout her dispute with H. B.—E. S.

this scoffingly ; I am no hater of femininity ; I think it is a very funny temperament which is constantly knocking the wind out of one ; but if you were not more subdivided than most women you would probably limit your artistic efforts to a pair of nicely embroidered slippers for Tom, Dick or Harry ; and I hope it would be neither Tom nor Dick. (Nor Harry either, for the matter of that, if I had to wear the slippers.)

Well, it is otherwise. You are subdivided, and I don't see what right one has to exact that the subdivision should stop at music. It does, I know, in some men—not many. I mean they are as analytical as possible as regards some particular talent, and lump all the rest of themselves womanwise. A combination highly approved of by the clergy and by the gentle thinkers who feel in safety near the teacups ; but a combination which I am so far from hitting off successfully, that least of all men I have the right or the inclination to be scandalised at its not shining with full brightness in you.

I simply refer to the different dispensations of Chapter I and Chapter II. Under this caution the trait you speak of is a point of resemblance between us.

Only we differ about dress. To me that also forms a subdivision quite by itself. I like to see well-dressed women, but as regards their animal attractiveness '*cela ne me fait ni froid ni chaud*,' and a shepherdess or a governess out at elbows might be just as suggestive as the finest dressed lady. Indeed I have half an idea that a very beautiful gown detracts one's attention from its contents ; and that is perhaps the reason of my partiality for tailor-made dresses. A touch of mannishness only serves to remind one of the difference. But now that I come to think of it, it is perhaps the same grain of perversity (very mild perversity indeed) that makes you fancy the, to my mind, very unmasculine get-up of the swell ; it would also account for your antipathy to beards. It may be that ; or it may be that you 'lump' your impressions of attire with the other order of meditations. I don't know. Anyhow, as

far as I am concerned in the matter, I am divided between an amused wish to humour you, and a melancholy reluctance to feel like a monkey on a barrel organ. Am I to wear a red sash? As for not stooping I heartily agree with you, and am always grateful to be reminded.

So it is the 18th of January? Very well. Tell me if Simons has sent you two boxes of cigarettes, and if they are just what you like. And don't forget to tell me as soon as the printer needs attending to.

I have just read an absurd book by Bjørnsen: 'The Heritage of the Kurts.' It is about a schoolmaster who wants men to wear orange-blossom on their wedding-day. He keeps a girls' school and all the maidens and teachers rave about this idea. He has also a passion for microscopes, and pictures of animals and plants, by the help of which he is confident that evil instincts can be combated; but only on condition that girls shall be fully instructed in anatomy and physiology, for which purpose he imports a lady doctor from America; and the girls write essays. Indeed one of them has a baby, which seems to me more to the point; but the schoolmaster is aghast till he explains it by mesmerism; and all the maidens weep and kiss and determine not to be mesmerised. Then the schoolmaster, who had vowed to live and die a single man because his father was a lunatic, changes his mind and marries one of his pupils. But the reason is not clearly given, so that one remains under the impression that it must be to illustrate the lectures of the lady doctor. Anyhow he is distinctly presented to us as an apostle. Good luck to his school. These Norwegians are wonderful people. The necessity of continuing the species puzzles them sorely; they have not got accustomed to it. Evidently a young race. Must have sprung from the ground about fifteen years ago. And yet he has a good deal of technical talent, this ineffable Bjørnsen.

If you want to read something interesting, in quite another style, get the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of the 1st of August and read: 'Études sur le XVII^e siècle; la

critique de Bayle ' by Brunetière. Very clever. You have never told me if you have read 'Marius the Epicurean' ? Oh dear me ! I wonder if all so-called philosophic natures get through as many books as I do ?

Enough for to-night. It is your turn. And don't be lazy, dear friend.

Your

H.

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

[*Reply to preceding letter.*]

Frimhurst.

September 26, 1892.

. . . Your letter is so absolutely delightful—I have just got it, and read it at breakfast (a solitary meal for me) laughing loudly and causing Marco much amazement—that it must be answered at once. I had half thought you might be huffy over my remarks on the independence of the animal instinct and my banal desires about clothes—and lo ! you aren't ! Now, as I told you in Paris, nothing touches me as much as the sweetness of him whom you expected to find soured by your frivolity. No, you are *not* to wear a red sash. . . .

Do you know, I think your accounting for my taste in clothes is a very correct one. I don't think it is because I 'lump' my sensations on the subject ; it is because I like the *contrepoids*—individuality set off by graceful concessions on grounds where you don't care to fight in front and are willing to show your brotherliness of feeling towards the race in general. If I analysed my actions I should find this instinct cropping up everywhere, I expect. Your mind is certainly the most absolutely individual I ever came across ; hence I yearn for your body to be clothed in the most conventional garments—*i.e.* the garments of the Dick, Tom and Harry of my own world. Your perfectly *vile* spelling—much worse than mine—is a perpetual delight to me. It is the kick of independence of those parts of speech you handle in such a masterful manner.

You tell me seriously to give my opinion on your comments on my remark about no one person satisfying another completely, but you must know I completely agree with them. I think the rub comes in this way ; each one's full and complete activity works towards the result upon which they have based their confederation—that is certain. But one were not human if one did not think some of the other's activity disastrous ; one rebels against the very faults of each other's qualities (*vide* your rebellion against my brutality and mine against your sensitiveness).

Also of course I agree with all you say about the only possible basis of matrimony and its sacrifices to the institution for the world and our brethren's sake. I have pondered much on matrimony lately, and on my absolute want of talent for it. Such gift as I may have had has perished of atrophy (this is very pathetic). But do you know when I realised all this so keenly?—in re-reading 'Anna Karénine'—though the feelings that alarmed me, by the way they re-echoed prophetically in my own breast, were born in her of her 'false position.' With all her devotion to Wronski she had moments of deepest hatred to him, if you remember, for the plight to which he had brought her. I think this would be my case towards the man who persuaded or swept me into the position of having to re-arrange myself for the public weal. A woman whose life is based on the denial of one fundamental instinct of womanhood (the tendril-like instinct), who has to say to herself 'Let me stand alone and collect my thoughts and say my say,' has already enough work on hand.

Some productive men even are incapable of further effort, and if they make it bring disaster on themselves, their wives, or the social fabric—witness Carlyle, Goethe, and, as an instance of a woman who, being too timorous to stand alone, married, and spoiled her work by this renunciation of her freedom, G. Eliot. Yes, you were rather annoyed when I said a secret *liaison* with the blessing of the Church would be what I should like ; now don't you see that it is not villainous of me to wish for that? You would not object to the same thing minus the latter

clause ; well then ! As for your remarks on subdivision and independent animal instinct, fear not. If I were married I should be an absolutely faithful wife because I do so agree with you about Clause II (social fabric, etc.).

N.B.—I much wonder if you would be a faithful husband. I really do wonder. You might be ; ‘you are so very odd.’¹

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

[Let action base on contact with reality—not on theories.]

Geneva.

October 3, 1892.

. . . I am in a fearful muddle of ideas ; partly perhaps because much meditation on these themes is apt to resolve into pictures which are absolutely of no use for the guidance of life ; and partly because to think about the guidance of life while sitting still under the pneumatic machine and out of the human atmosphere, is in itself a most unhealthy occupation—for me. Let us put the subject aside for the moment. I am inclined to think that any course of action that proceeds from theory, or knowledge of one’s self, is blighted beforehand. We don’t know why we are born, nor why we die, nor why we live and love and work ; it all comes about without consulting us and much to our surprise. All that is real about us, all that seems to have three dimensions to it, comes as a response to something that is outside ; we get nothing out of ourselves but ghosts, vain conceits, germless ego, and much pride. Later, in a few hundred years, when people know more, they will photograph this ; a person conversing with another one, and an atmosphere round them, made of very subtle radiations from both, wherein spiritual creatures are taking form and living. Then the same person thinking alone, with nothing but his own atmosphere round him, wherein skeletons are twitching convulsively and phantoms breeding. What rubbish books will seem in those days, mine perhaps among the lot ! What will stand the test then will be letters

¹ Remark made about him by one of his lady friends.

in which people took hold for a moment of one another's hand, and possibly the modest observations of scientific enquirers, the records of artless chroniclers, and the songs of poets who used their thoughts as musical chords.

Rod wants to send you his new novel as soon as it is published in book form (November). It is appearing now in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. He too happens to be reading 'Anna Karénine,' and feels crushed. To think that the man who wrote that book wants us now to live on vegetables ! Don't have gout when I come, please !

Your

H.

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

[*Platen's defence of Greek love.*]

October 6, 1892.

. . . I suppose you know Platen's poems ? I've just been reading Heine's 'Reisebilder.' Surely anything funnier was never written. And as for his remarks on Platen's admiration for Greek homosexuality, and his contention that the whole beauty of Shakespeare's Sonnets derives from their being written—or at least most of them—to a boy . . . well, you can imagine Heine on this theme !

I wonder why it is so much easier for me, and I believe for a great many English women, to love my own sex passionately rather than yours ? Even my love for my mother had an intense quality you can only call passion. How do you account for it ? I can't make it out for I think I am a very healthy-minded person and it is an everlasting puzzle. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

October 9, 1892.

. . . Renan's death is the loss of a friend to me. I rejoiced to see him honoured. I think he is the only man to whom I owe the debt of intellectual gratitude one owes to one's master. 'Le monde tel qu'il nous apparaît n'est ni clair ni simple, et vouloir nous le représenter comme tel,

c'est se mettre à un point de vue arbitraire, choisi en dehors de la réalité.' Simple words, but they came to me as the message of freedom in days when I was groaning under the load of abortive systems. . . .

. . . What an amount of affection you need ! I have read that when Mozart was a child he wanted at every moment to be assured of the love of the persons round him, stopping even in his music to ask them 'Do you love me ? . . . quite sure ? . . .'

. . . Telling you about Füsli's hair makes me remember my beard. I am wearing it short and pointed and it suits me well enough I think. Please give me notice beforehand, as I will not change it in England if this is authorised. You see I have grown quite nervous about my red sash and the way the bow is to be tied. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

[*A Swiss Rectory ; a pair of lovers ; women friendships.*]

October 29, 1892.

. . . My visit to the pastor yesterday was a dreary performance that lasted six hours—the journey there and back included (let us be grateful for that at least). His wife is the sister of Volkland's wife ; and that is how the trouble, I mean the lunch, originated. He is a worthy, excellent man with an unbounded veneration for literature, and he knows the names of some writers of the time of Louis Philippe. He makes little speeches at table in honour of his guests. 'Monsieur, Madame, et aussi les enfants.' This after knocking his glass with his knife to get silence. And one has to look cheerfully serious, attentive, gratified, unconcerned, and yet cordial. It is comic and touching ; he has lived there thirty years in his little parish, and his heart is as simple as Samuel's when he heard the Lord calling. His wife is great at sauces and 'schmarns' and looks at him with wondering pride each time he talks. Nothing can give an idea of the tediousness of four hours of conversation in that rectory, and yet it is so wonderfully far off, all of it, so primitive and Arcadian, that every now

and then it slips away from one into the beauty of distance. The cows, with big bells to their necks, browse under the windows : ' This is the forest primeval : the murmuring hemlocks and the pines . . . ' etcetera (*Evangeline*). I don't know on getting home whether to cry over my lost day or to dance before the ark.

Finally I had no time for either, as I had to correct the English prose of a French (Swiss-French) young lady, the same one Rod takes so great an interest in. Her Christian name is Nancy, and I have taught them the ballad :

Lord Lovell he stood at his castle gate
A-combing his milk white steed,
When up rode Lady Nancy Bell
A-wishing her lover good speed.

I think I have never told you anything about her. She is very pretty, dark and aged twenty-four. That is about all I know of her. The impression she produced on me clashes so strongly with what Rod tells me of her that her picture is quite blurred. I should have been inclined to think her expansive, energetic, with some dash and a little lurking adventurousness. He sees her as a timid violet, reserved, introspective, and sweetly melancholic. She has a sister who never opens her mouth. Well, the first time I met them they were together with their papa at the theatre. I talked and laughed with Lady Nancy, and I said to myself ' There is no accounting for tastes ; I would like this one much better than her sister.' For I was convinced it must be the sister from the descriptions I had heard. Surely the sister. And if not, then perforce the papa. But never my cheerful interlocutrix. (*N.B.*—This word is not in Webster. Take note of it ; you will find it handy.) But it was neither the sister nor the papa, as I found out later ; it was she. Now I am all muddled. So I just correct her prose without bothering about her.

You wonder why so many women prefer friends of their own sex, to the degree of being able to work up a much greater amount of excitement about them. Probably there are several reasons ; among others this one, that these

affections entail no duties, no sacrifice of liberty or of tastes, no partial loss of individuality ; whereas friendships of equal warmth with men have that danger (and others) in the background. This can be read either as a reproach to the women who have not enthusiasm enough to consent to moral drowning, or as a criticism on the institution of marriage and the restrictions it brings to both parties. And the two readings are justifiable ; the former applying to women who bear children and the second to women who don't. Maternity is the dividing line of ideals in these matters. But I am not going to write an essay. As regards the morbidity of these feelings, I don't see it. You are the healthiest person I have ever met. Nervous and 'twangy' sometimes, which is the fault of social conventions, but structurally health-in-person made woman for my delight.

I may tell you that on the subject we are speaking of now, Rod, who is quite the reverse of a sensual man, shares my opinion. He sees no harm nor ugliness in passionate female friendships, but as regards Platen we also agree ; the harm is that it is ludicrous. And then as he added, lazily yawning : ' C'est déjà si difficile de se trouver un ami. Bon Dieu ! que serait-ce s'il fallait se trouver *un* maîtresse ! ' Amen ! . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

[*Vitality the one thing needful.*]

Geneva.

November 24, 1892.

. . . What I like best in you after your own virtues is my vices ; and the more of the two you can drive in the same team the more exhilarated I feel. I wonder when this elementary notion will work its way into general literature ; that the goal is not perfection, nor this nor that, but high vitality, which may take any number of forms and which in every one of these includes a certain amount of viciousness of one kind or another. Do you know that the old Egyptians, recognising the ineradicability of the thieving instinct, had admitted thieves as a corporation

in the social body. They were syndicated and under control of the police. Every thief brought his booty to the headquarters of the corporation where it was officially estimated. If the person who had been robbed complained, and identified the stolen goods, they were returned to him against payment of 25 per cent. on the value. This is admirable. There is 25 per cent. for Beelzebub in each of us, and the science of life is to get a receipt for it in due form. . . .

[The following letters provide the heralded battle-piece that serves once for all as specimen of the clashes of temperament that mercifully save long and stable friendships from monotonous harmony. It would not do, of course, to let the battle-music sound too often, nor to strike it up on purpose ; but now and again it should, I think, of its own accord possess the air.]

Harry had written to me about his household changes, how Clotilde, his daughter, was going to Newnham, his son, Christopher, to school at Zürich. And partly because I was absorbed in my own affairs just then, partly because he and I always disagreed on education, but mainly for the first reason, I made no comment. This silence set him wondering whether I had 'huffy' recollections of a quarrel we had had at Paris on the topic of education. He 'hoped so,' confessing that, given my constant inveighing against huffiness in him, it would be gratifying to find a trace of it in me—a hope I had particular pleasure in shattering !]

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

November 26, 1892.

. . . Wait a thousand years and you will never see a shadow of huff in me ; whenever such a wretched growth shows its head through the soil it is uprooted as an alien weed. I hate these backwaters of a stream which ought to flow on pure and strong, and not disgrace itself by forming little stagnant pestilential pools and marshes on the way. I hate things that lead to nothing. Now certain kinds of checks in the system (such as checks to the action of the

skin—and huffiness is that sort of thing) lead to worse than nothing. It is like certain vices, meanness, stinginess, etc., about which there can never be anything pretty. I don't want them on anyone's programme, and if they are in the character of those I love, I should avoid doing anything to set that chord sounding . . . or try to. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

November 30, 1892.

. . . Don't be so viciously eloquent about sensitiveness. Everybody is more or less sensitive who is not callous, and I recollect your being much affronted when told by the Bensons that you had no love of nature, though the same reproach would not have ruffled me in the least. . . . The kind of sensitiveness you complain of in me only testifies to a rather foolish craving for sympathy in trifles ; it shows an unsuspecting, impolitic, somewhat childish habit of mind. A sarcasm or a criticism suddenly recalls the memory of one's own separateness, which people of an older character never forget—and so it hurts. I should be perfectly willing to dine in the servants' hall if asked to do so with a kind look, and might be much huffed, though placed at the hostess's right, if there were a shade of impatience in the manner in which she took my arm. It is silly if you will ; a harder, less sensually impressionable man would only wonder what the devil the hostess is impatient about ; he would not be foolish enough to come like a dog to be patted. I admire him and like him in that respect much better than myself, but I think it's rather a shame to class this failing along with meanness, stinginess, cowardice and so forth. . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

December 13, 1892.

. . . I was not *huffy* at the Bensons thinking I have no love of nature. That was merely the finishing touch to a long series of similar misconceptions, and my real feeling was indignation that people who fail to perceive one's

most obvious attributes should presume to pronounce on one's chances of eternal salvation.

As for you and me, we can be angry with each other, but huffiness between close friends is inadmissible. I had the oddest dream, or rather sensation about it last night. You know I still am, and always shall be, liable to passionate grief for my mother's death. Well, I often dream, as last night, that she was back again and I was very happy ; when suddenly the chill dreary atmosphere which was with us half the time during her life . . . ' Oh dear ! she's *hurt* again about something ! ' came over me, and I awoke, almost saying ' No ! this is not good enough ! '

It seems to me that life is so short, and the real difficulties so great, that time spent in weaving and disentangling yourself from imaginary ones is time lost. To have to pet and soothe a grown-up person out of a mood he himself allows is childish seems to me rather deplorable, yet I would never think tackling a real difficulty lost time. I suppose the greatest trial of my life was its embitterment by the touchiness of my mother, and certainly it is that which made her the unhappy woman she was. Think of what is the greatest trial of your own life in the way of characteristics you have had to put up with in those near you, and ask yourself if you could begin it all again with someone else ?

I feel about huffiness as a new friend of mine, a nice English widow, does about shyness. I said of someone that she was painfully shy, and my widow ejaculated : ' What a bore shy people are ! I have no patience with them.' Thereupon my heart warmed to her so much that I'm thinking of trying to dislodge her horrible widow's cap from her head ! . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

[*He will not defend his character.*]

Rome.

December 22, 1892.

. . . When I got here I found all the furniture of Florence (and you know the rooms were big) bundled higgelty-

piggelty, if that is the way to spell it, into the apartment, and about two thousand books sprawling round.

For four or five days I circulated among my worldly goods somewhat like a monkey from the top of one tree to another. And the dust! And the *facchini*! and my presence of mind, and my composure, and the number of cheap long cigars (with a straw down their digestive tube) that I have smoked! It had its grandeur. But my inner life is defunct or asleep. The thread of memory is broken. Speak to me of a chest of drawers or of wardrobes and my brain reacts; my muscles contract instinctively and the right thing is done. But who I am, and what I am doing here are matters of placid conjecture to me. To-morrow morning I am going out riding with an Italian officer, young Cini, who I fancy would rather like to be my son-in-law, having great illusions concerning my fortune—what a big word for such a small thing!—and concerning the ‘dots’ of American girls. Perhaps I shall remember something about myself when I have had a good gallop. He is a great man on horseback and has no other interest in life. Quite the companion I want just now.

Here and there I have had a stray moment of rest; been to the Forum one lovely evening, and once to the Vatican, just as one gets a glimpse of sunshine sometimes on a foggy day in London. And then I have mused over your amusing letter. You seem determined to prove to me that I have a horrid character! That is bad. You are such a delightfully healthy young creature yourself that I suppose you must be right. And yet I feel occasionally as though there were some good points about me. But you may be right for all that.

Well, what can I do? I can never do but one thing, always the same. I think it is my only trick. I am like the man in white that youngsters make up with a cardboard head carried on a broomstick and a tablecloth fastened under his chin; every now and then the broomstick is pushed up a foot or two, and as dangers thicken around him he grows taller and taller and thinner and thinner till he disappears through the ceiling, and

nothing remains on the floor but a little wee boy whom anybody can punish that chooses to. Only the cardboard head is my real head and it is the little boy who seems to me a sham, partly a nicely behaved and partly a badly behaved young (or old) sham. I look down and watch him as the playfellow of a moment, sometimes almost with sympathy, and sometimes with contemptuous indifference. 'How long, dear death? . . .' as Rossetti prettily says. If that be myself it would not amuse at all to find myself again ; in heaven or anywhere else.

Some of the people I have met here I should not mind meeting again ; but myself, the self of which you complain, no ! Throw him into the dustman's cart and good-bye to him !

This is a way of telling you that I don't care to plead the cause of your enemy and am quite willing to pass over to the other camp. If I am badly constructed, at least I am tall enough to be able to look down on myself, in fact to look over my own head. It would be very foolish and small of me if, delighting as I do in the genial expansive quality of your character, I assumed to have nothing to learn from it, and undertook to defend, otherwise than for the fun of fencing, traits which are the least congenial to it. Perhaps whatever redeeming qualities I may have will be all the more acceptable to you for this admission ; and at any rate I shall feel at ease to wage war against you when inclined to.

. . . While I think of it : there is a certain amount of truth in Bourget's remark on the feud of the sexes, though he is an unsympathetic nature. Only I think the real feud is intellectual and need not touch the affective nature. That is my objection to priests and the church generally ; it is the feminine intellect at work in men and spoilt thereby.

As for the kind of hatred you allude to as cherishing sometimes against me, I know it well and return it heartily, and have not the slightest objection to it ; nor you either, I daresay, if the truth were known. Don't stint yourself in that direction on my account.

. . . Yes, as you say, our relation to one another must

certainly be an unthinkable thing to most people. But it is a very pretty thing. It seems to me we have got rid of so much of the childishness that rather mars most intimacies of the gentler kind; a sort of baby talk of the feelings however grandly they may be worded. I only know of two authors who I fancy could have described something of the sort: Stendhal and Meredith; and they have neglected to do so, perhaps because they neglected to live the thing. Rod questions me—with great discretion and tact of course (he is a man of very delicate feelings) and takes off his eye-glass and puts it on again, and lifts his chin higher than ever, and confesses that he cannot understand. He is for divine baby talk or nothing. . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

December 28, 1892.

. . . You are provokingly mild if you really believe—but you don't, whatever you may say!—that I think you have a horrid character. You have a character that can bring tears to my eyes when I think of it—so sweet, so lovable is it, apart from all the elements that come under the head of brains and make you what you are. All I say is you have *one* trait I don't like and have no special arms to combat! . . .

Some people need handling on large lines to come out well, and though one can painfully adapt oneself to other manipulations—as a free fencer might, if intelligent enough, carry a nervous sticky rider without spilling him—still one longs for the light, trustful hand on the reins.

You know all this, and make a better piece of work of thy servant than anyone else beneath the stars, so I will only say once more that, given the vastness of your intuition and outlook, touchiness beseems you as little as, say, impatience of being found fault with would beseem me! That's all I meant! . . .

[*Here the specimen battle ends.*]

CHAPTER X

(JANUARY 1893)

DURING January the Mass rehearsals became intensive. Never had I hated anything so much. All composers who have not yet arrived know what it is to sit helpless while your explicit instructions as to *tempi*, volume of sound and everything else, are being brushed aside as irrelevant . . . and O ! your timid attempts to modify the conductor's reading without putting his back up . . . terrible ! terrible ! But worst of all are upsurging floods of hatred for the work itself—result, one hopes, of nerves—followed by an inclination to say to some conscientious soloist : ‘ O *please* don't take all that trouble ! It really isn't worth it ! ’ The soloists and chorus were delightful, and so was Barnby, although he afterwards confessed it was not till the last rehearsal that he discovered what he called ‘ an iron rod ’ running through music that hitherto had struck him as disjointed, over-exuberant, and unnatural. Anything so different to the Three Choirs' outlook and technique would inevitably seem all that to an English Choral conductor of the early 'nineties—at least until he got accustomed to it.

The high-water mark of misery was touched at the first orchestral rehearsal, when I realised various mistakes I had made—for instance, scoring the solo parts of the *Sanctus* for a quartett of soft brass. When the poor contralto, emerging from a welter of choral and orchestral billows, attacked one of her solo passages, I perceived that a brass

curtain ring flung to an overboard passenger in mid-Atlantic would be about as adequate a 'support' as my four lonesome instrumentalists, who in that vast empty hall sounded like husky mosquitoes. No sooner was the rehearsal over than armed with music-paper, scissors, stickphast, and all the accursed paraphernalia of composers, I ensconced myself in the bowels of the edifice and re-scored the *Sanctus*, as it were at the cannon's mouth.

This incident deepened the gloom induced by listening to the noises for which I was responsible. The standard of orchestral playing and sight reading was very different then to what it is now, and whereas a seasoned composer, hearing his music stumbled through for the first time, knows that by and by it will sound very different, I had written too little, and heard what I had written too seldom to be confident as to my scoring, particularly in the case of a first big choral work. Henschel kept on reassuring me, but I put it down to kindness, and went home despair in my heart.

Next morning at the final rehearsal an unforgettable thing happened. Barnby had told me they would begin by putting through its paces that good old Choral Society war-horse, Haydn's *Creation*, two parts of which made up the second half of the programme ; so that if I turned up at 11 it would be soon enough. By 10.30, however, I was tearing madly round and round those labyrinthine corridors, up and down those countless staircases, vainly trying to find the way to the stalls. Now nearer, now farther, what in my fever seemed to me exquisite orchestral sonorities assailed my ear : ' Ah ! ' said I to myself, in sick misery, ' *that's* how I'd like my music to sound ! ' . . . Drawing nearer suddenly a phrase seemed strangely familiar . . . ! Merciful heaven ! it was my own Mass !

.

Meanwhile a few absurd side issues were being dealt with. It will be remembered that nothing but the Empress's

promise to be present had induced Messrs. Novello to meet me halfway as regards the expenses of printing the Mass. Nor could anyone blame them. If to this day the announcement on a programme of a work by an unknown English composer has a decimating effect on the attendance, 'how not much more so,' to use a favourite locution of our Frimley Rector, was this the case in the 'nineties? Now the Queen had put the Royal box at the Empress's disposal, and as the latter was possessed by the notion that it would not do to ask anyone but her immediate suite (three people in all) to sit in it, I was requested to secure boxes on either side for her friends and mine. Meanwhile the Royal box turned out to be four huge boxes knocked into one; all the other good ones on that tier were private property, and my suggestion that their owners, should they not be using them, might be asked for permission to let them for that one night, was met by the box office with cries of horror—such a thing was unheard of, quite impossible, in fact guarded against in the owners' leases and so on. Hence it appeared likely that the showiest part of the house would exhibit a grand tier consisting of red-plush pens, empty but for white and gold chairs—a variant on the Circles in Dante's *Inferno*, the thought of which sent the spirits of the Secretary and Treasurer down to zero.

Lady Ponsonby saved the situation. At her suggestion Sir Henry took charge and informed the Empress that the Queen—and also two of the Princesses, who had graciously intimated an intention to be present—hoped she would ask anyone she liked to join her in the box. Which she did, *via* her Society Prime Minister, Madame Arcos (whose selections for this honour based less on love of the arts than on social distinction). Sir Henry then intimated to the box office that this was a special occasion, that their aristocratic and millionaire patrons must be apprised of the fact, and that the *Duke of Edinburgh, President of the Royal*

Choral Society, hoped everyone concerned would work for a full house and cease to make difficulties.

The night before the performance, as settled long ago, the Henschels' unforgettable dinner party took place. The guests were my father, his six daughters (my brother Bob, alas! was in India), his five sons-in-law and . . . Harry Brewster! This was the first meeting between the two men, and though my father's behaviour was impeccable, we who knew him noticed that occasionally as his glance rested on this rather foreign-looking stranger, his upper lip rose slightly in a fashion that always reminded us of a dog who doesn't mean to fight, but now and again can't help showing his teeth—a demonstration less noticeable, luckily, in an old gentleman with a moustache than in a dog.

Papa, who, like Lady Ponsonby, pronounced his 'a's' in North Country fashion, as in the word 'passage,' remarked afterwards to one of my sisters that Brewster had 'a nasty face'; and though this remark infuriated me at the time, I now see in it one more proof of perspicacity and extensive knowledge of the world. Harry was a dreamer, but as my readers will have gathered by no means a despiser of the joys of the flesh; and though the face was almost ultra-refined, to the eye of experience these traits could be read on it. In fact his was a type of which an old soldier would instinctively disapprove.

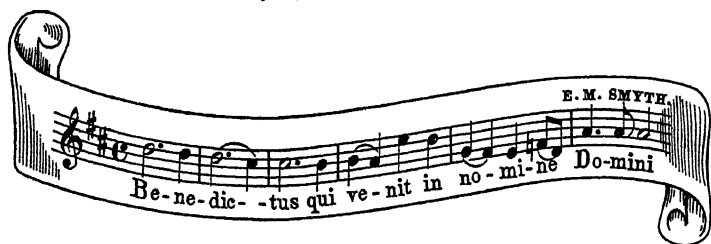
The peaceful outcome of their meeting was therefore rather a relief to me, for, given what a last-century parent would consider a reprehensibly unconventional friendship between his daughter and a married man, I had half expected he might refuse to come to the party. By and by, meditating his accommodatingness, I came to the conclusion it was partly because such of my family as knew Harry liked him so much, partly because Henschel and his wife were perfectly devoted to him, but mainly from a dim sense that this sort of thing was outside his ken and that it was wisest not to

make a fuss. After all, Brewster was evidently no pauper . . . perhaps his wife was an invalid and some day our friendship might end in marriage . . . who knows? And seeing that in past disputes I had never got the worst of it, the situation had better be accepted. Few incidents in my life cast a more maturing ray on such knowledge of human nature as I possessed than this strand in the make-up of my old-world, simple-hearted, rigorously brought-up father ; an obscure instinct he could not have formulated which occasionally prompts even a martinet of morality to let his blind eye see him through.

Altogether the evening was a brilliant success. Beside each plate lay a card on which the first bars of the *Benedictus* were engraved, and written above them the name of the sitter-designate.¹

45 Bedford Gardens
January 17th 1893.

Mrs. Hunter.



In Germany no festive meal is thinkable without at least one speech, and my youngest sister reminds me of an

¹ Being true artists both Henschel and I were greedy, and the menu was as follows : clear soup, creamed lobsters, pigeons, fillet of beef, pheasant, apple tart, coffee jelly, charlotte russe, stuffed olives, dessert.

incident I had forgotten, that during dinner Henschel proposed the health of General Smyth, 'without whom this party could never have taken place . . . *nor indeed the Mass!*'—a fact which I fancy had escaped the General's attention, as it certainly had mine!

At this point a pang holds up the chronicling pen. How this little record of what we all called 'The Mass Meeting' would have pleased that dear old friend who, alas, just missed reading it! He died only the other day (1934) aged 84, to the last in full possession of all the riches of his most lovable nature, including his voice and his nimble pianistic fingers. The worst of growing old yourself is that more and more often have you to murmur in some particular application: '*too late!*' After which, banishing sterile regrets, you make a fresh start along your appointed road.

The performance next day was, I believe, a really fine one. The soloists were Miss Esther Palliser (soprano), Madame Belle Cole (contralto), Mr. Watkin Mills (bass), and the tenor was Mr. Ben Davies, a contemporary of mine who is still going strong both as man and musician, and in whose recent Jubilee I was privileged to take a humble part. Then as now the chorus was first rate, compact too of friendliest enthusiasm, and judging by the reception of the work it seemed as if the Mass had come to stay. My sister, Mary Hunter, had secured the box next the Empress's, and in 'The Puppet Show of Memory' Maurice Baring, whom that night I met for the first time, has recorded how our hunting friends from the North rallied round us. One of them, Mr. Sheldon Cradock, my sister's favourite pilot in the hunting-field, whispered in her ear during the *Credo*: 'I say, Mrs. Charlie! . . . this is slashing stuff, what?'

The only other unofficial comment I recall is that of Archbishop Benson, who overhearing bits of it at Addington,

remarked afterwards that in this Mass God was not *implored* but *commanded* to have mercy. Here Maggie Benson who though not musical had listened, poor thing, to a good deal of Mass-talk, said that if he was alluding to the *Christe Eleison* section, she understood that what had been aimed at was an expression of *intense terror*. 'Indeed?' said His Grace; 'I can only repeat that to me it sounded like orders issued in an extremely peremptory manner.'

.

The after story, which began next day, was tragic enough. Except as regards the scoring, which got good marks on all sides, the Press went for the Mass almost unanimously—some with scorn, some with aversion, in all cases adopting a tone of patronage it was hardest of all to bear. No one seemed to recognise anything praiseworthy in it, and my sole comfort from outside was a letter from a German named Krall—critic, I think, on some Northern Journal—the gist of which was, that though the thing was probably knocked out for the time being, I must not lose heart, because . . . and here followed a judgment, both spiritually and technically motivated, of such warmth that it might have been written by Levi! Talk about life-belts, how I clung to that letter in the months that followed . . . and long after!

I think the slaying of the Mass (for knowing England he must have been aware it amounted to that) not only distressed but honestly surprised Barnby. Yet gazing back into the 'nineties, with the accumulated experience of forty years to clarify vision, I see that nothing else could have been expected. Year in year out, composers of the Inner Circle, generally University men attached to our musical institutions, produced one choral work after another—not infrequently deadly dull affairs—which, helped along by the impetus of official approval, automatically went the round of our Festivals and Choral Societies, having paid the publisher's expenses and brought in something for the composers

before they disappeared for ever. Was it likely, then, that the Faculty would see any merit in a work written on such very different lines—written too by a woman who had actually gone off to Germany to learn her trade?

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(*Postscript.*)

This record is planned to slide methodically down the Calendar. But before again taking up the narrative I will permit myself a long jump forward into the first quarter of the present century in order to finish the story of the Mass—which, I promise my readers, will be the only story of the kind told in these pages, but which had to be told here, because it happens to have been a crucial turning point in my life.

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In the middle 'twenties, my pre-war musical activities having been staged mainly in Germany, I bethought me, I forget in what connection, of the Mass, which had never achieved a second performance, which none but grey-beards had heard, and the existence of which I had practically forgotten. A couple of limp and dusty piano-scores were found on an upper shelf, and after agitated further searchings and vain enquiries at Messrs. Novello's, the full score turned up in my loft. In spite of the judgment of the Faculty the work had evidently been appreciated by the mice, and on sitting down to examine it I shared their opinion, and decided that it really deserved a better fate than thirty-one years of suspended animation. But when I consulted the publishers as to the possibility of a revival, the reply was: 'Much as we regret to say so, we fear your Mass is dead.'

This verdict stung me into activity, and to cut a long story short, in 1924 Adrian Boult produced it brilliantly in Birmingham, and the following week in London. This time the Press was excellent; other performances followed,

and one day I seem to have intimated to Messrs. Novello, that had they pushed the thing after its first production, I should not have had to wait thirty-one years for a second performance. Their reply is so interesting and convincing, that with their permission I give part of it.

160, Wardour Street, W. 1.

July 14, 1927.

. . . "You suggest that we made no effort to get the Mass performed. *That is absolutely untrue.* We do not give Concerts ourselves, but we are constantly consulted about the drawing up of programmes and are repeatedly asked to submit samples and make recommendations to Selection Committees. *Your Mass has been introduced by us in that way scores of time . . . with the results you know. We for several years did our utmost to get it performed, but no one seemed to take to it; so we naturally after a time regarded it as a dead horse and ceased to flog it.*

We may mention moreover that it could not have been revived recently at Birmingham and performed elsewhere if we had not shown our sympathy in a practical way. . . .

You also say the revival of the Mass has cost you a good deal of money, and that during all these years it has brought you in nothing. We venture to remark that if you get no profit, *you*, at all events, get pleasure and *Kudos*, whereas *we* see no probability that the accounts will ever show a balance in our favour. Moreover, we get very little pleasure and no *Kudos* out of publishing what must be written down a failure.

Yours faithfully,

NOVELLO & Co., LTD."

The whole story of the Mass casts such a vivid light on English musical conditions, that it may well figure in the Cultural Appendix some future editor will tack on to 'Mrs. Markham's History of England,' though I fear 'little Mary's' comment would no longer be what it would have been at the time that admirable book was first published. 'But dear Mama' (she would have asked), 'was it not

right that that lady should have been punished for trying to do things that should be left to the gentlemen?'

What Mrs. Markham would have replied I do not know. She was sometimes rather guarded and might merely have said: 'Indeed, dear child, we should always remember, that, as your Papa so often tells us, gentlemen are much *cleverer* than we are.' But I am quite certain that in 1893 it will have displeased the Faculty—sub-consciously of course—that what is called *masculine*, i.e. *strong* music, should be written by a woman. Why, only five years previously, when my Violin Sonata had been produced at the Gewandhaus, Leipzig, the reproach 'un-feminine music' was freely bandied about!

In England, the land that bred Ladies Mary Wortley Montague and Hester Stanhope, that was presently to produce the Woman's Suffrage Movement, Amy Johnson, and above all the heroine of 'National Velvet,' who I am convinced is no mere creation of Enid Bagnold's pen—in England, I say, men are apt to enshroud in mist, or otherwise account for some of their 'natural' reactions on kindred themes. But prejudice and hereditary twists—carefully disguised—are there all the same.

Yet let none fancy that these alone explain many a turning down, like that of the Mass. The majority of people have a genuine aversion, of which I myself am conscious on other fields, from ideas that do not keep the highway and ways of feeling not in vogue at the moment. But I hope to touch briefly on this very important subject in the Epilogue.¹

And herewith farewell, a long farewell, to 'The Mass and All That.'

¹ See a remarkable reference to a German critic's view, Letter Section IV, p. 319.

CHAPTER XI

(SPRING 1893)

HARRY, who was in the throes of a migration from Florence to Rome, and had merely rushed over for the Mass, returned to Italy next morning, and I went down to Osborne to write my name in the Queen's book—she having sent me through the Empress a wonderfully kind message about the Mass—and incidentally to see Lady Ponsonby who to my distress had not heard it.

Next day Mary bore me off to their house, Selaby, near Darlington, for a spell of hunting. That very night Henschel was conducting one of his Symphony Concerts, and I had had to break to him at the party that I should not be present. This he could hardly believe. I had explained that I was worn out, and possessed by only one idea—to get away from London and music; then had followed (haltingly) a confession that hunting was a master-passion I could but seldom indulge, and that to miss the very best meet of the Zetland hounds (this point took some expounding) was a sacrifice no one who knows what the clutch of sport can be would ask of a friend. At last Henschel had more or less taken it in, but all evening he kept on murmuring at intervals, 'And this is the woman who wrote the Mass!'

The circumstances at Selaby were favourable for me just then, for Mary was rather ill and I was to have the use of her horses, of course the best in the stable, whereas as a rule I rode Charlie's—big powerful animals with mouths

and manners formed to his really rather desperate style of riding, he being the sort of man who, if he had taken a wrong turn, would literally cram his horse at anything rather than go round 200 yards. One or two tosses I saw him take make me shudder even now to think of. Small wonder that Mary, who was not a bold rider, preferred being piloted by either Mr. Sheldon Cradock or Sir William Eden, who had ridden that country from boyhood upwards, who knew all that was to be known about hunting, who were both of them fine horsemen, especially Sir William, and who seldom or never risked their necks. My brother-in-law used sometimes to remark almost tearfully that led by Cradock or Eden his wife would face a six-foot wall but refused to follow him over a walking-stick. He also maintained with truth that she invariably jumped over the identical twig her pilot had selected.

He was a Northumbrian, son of a coal-owner. Some years ago he and Mary had made a love-match on about £200 a year, at which time he went just as hard on any screws he could pick up ; but nowadays he was making a fortune, and more generous with his many hunters than any man I ever heard of—generous to the point of liking to see them ridden for all they were worth.

He did not know what fear meant. Once when he was a young man I saw him make a rush for the Newcastle train which was already moving out of Morpeth station at a good speed, the engine being already under the bridge, and take a header through the window of a smoking compartment, landing on the knees of several business men who were already deep in the morning paper. Ten or fifteen years later, when my sister became the friend and model of many painters and sculptors—Rodin, Sickert, Monet, Sargent, Jacques Blanche, and the like—few people guessed that the sporting husband in tweeds who settled the bills had perhaps an even greater natural love of fine pictures, and more particularly of fine furniture, than Mary, though I think

many would have agreed with me that on almost any subject his opinion was worth listening to ; more so than that of some of his wife's brainy friends, with whom he was perhaps not quite at his ease.

One could not call him handsome, I suppose, but he was goodly to look on and women found him very attractive. A happy couple, they lived even now on a large scale, but occasionally Mary would bewail a certain economical twist in his makeup, which was partly no doubt a reaction against an exactly opposite twist in hers that yearly became more manifest. One day she said to me with solemn emphasis : ' I consider it my *sacred duty* to spend every penny I can of Charlie's money.' Later on, alas ! she went beyond the limits of this pious resolution ; but whether because he was in love with her to the last, or because no human force could stop her once her will was set, he was powerless to put on the brake. When the war broke out he was furious at not being allowed, because of his age, to go to the front with his yeomanry, suspecting as little as did any of us—for the old dash and energy were as strong as ever—that he was already marked for death.

He died in 1916 and the motto on the memorial window his family put in Theydon Bois Church was a Northumbrian locution once applied to him by a local hunting farmer : ' Nowt fears him,' which of course means ' He's afraid of nothing ' ; but it rather puzzled some of their neighbours in Essex.

My idea being to get in as much excitement as possible in the time, he and I suited each other to perfection in the hunting-field. As an amusing side-light on marital balance I will add that once or twice he said to Mary, ' You're making that mare refuse : I shall put up Ethel on her on Thursday ! '—a remark she greatly resented and which was drawn out of him because, by refusing, the horse cast an aspersion on his knowledge of horse-flesh and of horse-dealers. On the other hand he was rather jealous at the

appreciation my singing met with, and often said 'Well, my dear, *I* think Mary sings a lot better than you !'

I forgot to say that a couple of years previously one of Papa's bargains, a horrible cob I was schooling over a railed gap in a fence with a ditch beyond, which it could jump perfectly if it chose, behaved as underbred animals often do, refused at the last moment, stuck its toes under the rail and deliberately fell down flop into the ditch where it lay on the top of me, slowly and surely grinding my right arm out of its socket. The following year, hunting too soon perhaps, before the muscles had recovered tone, one day when my horse came to grief at a fence out went the shoulder again. The only person close at hand was Charlie, who, having once seen a doctor set a dislocated arm in the hunting-field, suggested an attempt to nick in mine across his knee. Being in pain I jumped at the idea, and when the operation was successfully accomplished I never saw a man more pleased with himself than Charlie.

Of course one knew this might happen again any moment but hoped for the best. And now, on the very first day, my horse pecked on the far side of the first fence we came to, rolled over, deposited me gently in the field and history repeated itself. Luckily our sporting doctor was out that morning, and much to Charlie's disappointment I think, jerked in the arm across a gate ; after which I rode home without pain but repressing tears, for of course this would mean at least ten days or more abstention from hunting. As a matter of fact I had to stay in bed, enduring the after-effects of a prolonged nervous effort—fever, rheumatism, and indigestion, not to speak of pain in my shoulder and rage in my heart—for more than two weeks during which time they were of course having splendid sport. This, Mary said, was a judgment on me for having openly expressed a wish that her indisposition might be prolonged ! An ingeniously planned belt with shoulder-strap, etc., to

keep my elbow close to my side, made it possible to hunt again, and my last day was a grand run with the Bedale, after which a hard frost set in and kindly mitigated the pang of having to leave Selaby.

That night at dinner an exhibition of male vanity occurred which amused even that wholesale admirer of the other sex, Mary. A partner of my youthful days, a certain Major Hubert Foster, turned up who had been rather in love with either me or Nina—I forget which . . . perhaps both. He was very clever on Staff College lines, knew dozens of languages, and possessed, I always thought, more brains than he could conveniently handle. Now I had always preferred sitting out to dancing with him, not because of his conversation but because though too sharp to dance out of time with me, I knew he would be quite capable of it with others ; in short the time-passion was not in him. Eventually he guessed the secret of this odd craze for sitting out, challenged me, and whenever we met (which at one time was pretty often) referred to the burning topic, being unable to get over the wound to his self-esteem. And now, fifteen years afterwards, it actually started all over again ! ‘ I told your sister ’ (he said to Mary) ‘ that women who danced just as well as she did had told me I danced *very well*. And do you know what her answer was ? that *no* woman of my acquaintance danced as well as she did, and that the people who praised my dancing were *either ignoramuses or flatterers* ! ’ Here I said firmly from the other side of the table, ‘ It was quite true, and I say the same thing to-day ! ’ Whereupon he turned so pale with rage that even Mary laughed ; then I laughed, and he, being a good fellow, laughed too, and the painful incident closed. But he got his own back presently by repeating an anecdote he had found and saved up for me in the recently published ‘ Conversations with Dr. Döllinger ’ ; that when Madame de Maintenon asked our Ambassador, Lord Stair, why our affairs go so much more smoothly under queenly than

kingly rule, his reply was : ' Because a reigning King is ruled by women, and a Queen by men.'

I will conclude the visit to Selaby with a confession. Though I hope the shoulder-strap did not affect my performance such as it was, the knowledge that if your horse falls you can do nothing to save yourself, above all the fatigue of holding a high-couraged animal together at his fences when you have only a few inches' play for your right arm, certainly lessens your enjoyment. I had already been bitten by the golf passion that was slowly creeping southwards—a pastime in which there are no hours of shivering at covert side, no blank days, no having to put up with only six small fences in four hours. The French declare that not more than one in a hundred English fox-hunters either knows or cares anything about the working of hounds, the rest looking on hunting simply as '*de l'équitation*.' This was certainly my case, and now I was haunted by the knowledge that, even with the strap, a fall might stop one's writing and piano playing for a week or so—a very unpleasant thought. Thus it came to pass that by degrees, in spite of reproaches from Charlie, I began to take up golf seriously, and eventually became as mad about it as I had been about hunting.

Soon after my return to Frimhurst, considering how wonderfully kind the Queen had been about the Mass, I did what my father called ' the right and proper thing,' and went for the first and last time of my life to a Drawing Room. Of course I could not raise £40 for a suitable garment, but a hired ' train ' gave countenance to the rather dirty dinner-gown from which it floated ; also with many a groan I had spent 10s. 6d. on having my hair waved and built up in the Cherokee Chief style which was then the fashion. The result of these efforts was that while Mary and I were standing at the barrier, a manly voice I

at once recognised as that of Lady Jane Taylor remarked, 'You are so smart I should not have known you but for your veil smelling so of smoke'; after which we at once launched into her then favourite topic, the sacred number in the Revelations (666).

When the time came for passing on into the Presence, the Queen shook hands with me (which I was told afterwards was an unusual demonstration) and congratulated me with real warmth on the success of the Mass 'of which the Empress Eugénie informed me.' And as those among the other royalties whom I knew kindly did the same, I held up the whole procession of worshippers, who doubtless were dying to uncork their own bottled-up curtsseys. In short I made quite a sensation, which is seldom unpleasant, and instead of being bored as I had expected, thoroughly enjoyed myself. The waxworks effect of these great ones all standing in a row was delightful and impressive—a sort of glorified annex of *Madame Tussaud*—and round the corner one half-expected to come upon Mr. Alick Yorke as Marat in his bath, a dagger protruding from his swelling breast.¹

This last distraction over I went back to work with renewed vigour, trying the while to possess my soul in patience till Lady Ponsonby should return from Osborne. It was for me the early days of that most magical of springtimes, the beginning of a friendship which I well knew would change the whole colour of my life. At last I had found what had been lacking ever since Lisl broke the link between us—a woman a good deal older than myself who drew out every ounce of what seemed the natural complement to such creative power as I possessed—the devotion it was in me to give. And in spite of her self-dedication to a programme of reserve and negation, I had come to hope she was relaxing in my favour.

¹ Mr. Alick Yorke, who belonged to the Household, organised all the musical and dramatic entertainments got up by the Princesses and the ladies and gentlemen of the Court.

The Empress Frederick, her one intimate friend among the Queen's daughters, was now staying at Windsor, and Lady Ponsonby, who was on perfectly frank and free terms with her august friend, had urged her to read 'The Prison.' And when the Empress remarked that it was very clever and interesting 'but all these things have been said before,' Lady Ponsonby had said, 'My dear Madam, if you say that you have missed the point.' Of course I knew that as long as the visit lasted she would be, and gladly be, at the Empress's beck and call, but what I never expected was a summons one day to come to Windsor as Her Majesty wished to make my acquaintance.

I went, and completely succumbed to her charm ('I see she will be the next *culte*,' said Lady Ponsonby). A remarkable woman evidently, this second tragic Empress I had come in contact with; very friendly, forthcoming, and unalarming—at least in that particular conjunction—and brimming with enthusiasm for art, but with a marked tendency to slide off into abstract questions. I recollected once having heard Lady Elphinstone, the Duchess of Connaught's lady, say that when she and her husband had stayed a month at San Remo shortly before the Emperor Frederick's death, they remarked to each other afterwards that unlike most royal personages—and she might have added unlike most ordinary mortals—these two discussed art, science and every sort of abstraction, but scarcely ever mentioned people.

This impressed me a good deal, and when I passed it on to Lady Ponsonby (who was for ever holding up impersonalism as a worthier ideal than my direct and eminently personal methods) she allowed this was truly a characteristic and fine trait in her friend. Nevertheless, whether or no from the famous Grey spirit of contradiction, she went on to say that the Empress hammered so hard on the impersonal note that almost any one would sometimes feel inclined, as she herself did, to come over into my camp for the time being.

Amusingly enough the trio we performed in the Empress's rooms at the Castle afforded a case in point. It appeared that she had been really keen to know me, was interested in anything she could hear about me, asked if I 'went in' for being unlike other people, and when Lady Ponsonby said 'No—she is not a *poseuse*' remarked dreamily 'Ah! . . . very curious!'

Well, 'the contrapuntalist' duly produced, Lady Ponsonby quickly steered the conversation into the subject that just then was more than ever in the forefront of her own mind, and which she knew was the sort of theme to interest the Empress, namely, the relative value of the impersonal and the personal angles towards life. Then, presently, I was asked to sing; while I was singing the Empress (who I felt at once knew the difference between real things and shams) wept; and after my dismissal it appears she did speak about the singing—but about the singer not one word! Next day when the two met at the Queen's dinner party she instantly plunged into the subject of yesterday's debate, having partly assimilated my view, partly Lady Ponsonby's, but had evidently forgotten which of us said what! And it provoked Lady Ponsonby that the ideas we suggested should be treated as of so much more consequence than we ourselves—a relapse from her usual austerity that gave me great satisfaction. But Her Majesty sent a message to say she would gladly do anything she could about the Mass in Germany, which Lady Ponsonby declared was no empty phrase. And next day, lunching at Cumberland Lodge, Princess Christian informed me I could count on the goodwill of her elder sister—a fact which caused a certain rise in my stock, for all her family were more than slightly in dread of the Empress Frederick.

Of that luncheon I have an entertaining recollection. Shown straight up into the Princess's room I had the impression that she and her daughter, Princess 'Tora,'

were just at the end of a quarrel, or at least a dispute that if not bitter had not been entirely sweet. The lady of the house began by saying she never remembered such a lovely spring as we were having, did I not agree? . . . yet 'Christian' was so ungrateful and disagreeable and said it was detestable weather. As a matter of fact all March a steady, fateful east wind had raged, accompanied by blazing sun, and I replied that I preferred my liver not being shrunk to the size of a pea, and thought the weather quite horrible. '*So do I,*' exclaimed Princess Tora with emphasis, and her mother, really rather annoyed, declared it was positively wicked of us. And down we went to lunch, where, in that delightful household, usually so peaceful and harmonious, gentle sparring never ceased for one second; indeed the scene that followed might be entitled 'East Wind at Cumberland Lodge.'

First there was a political argument, and the Princess dared her husband to say that a body of *English Gentlemen* (the House of Lords) would fail in the hour of need. Accepting the challenge the Prince said he thought nothing more likely, and added, turning to me, 'But *you*, of course, are no better than a radical'—this because of a remark of mine sometime back on the burning question of County Councils. I replied that if to believe that other people besides gentlemen-born possess common sense and a love of justice makes you a radical, I certainly was one. 'That's right,' cried his wife, 'give it to him! He thinks *you* are a woman of sense; but as for *me*, being an idiot, of course I can't speak' . . . This from that kindest, sweetest-natured of women, whose renewed comments on the rubbish talked about the East Wind were followed by a little skirmish with her daughter over the last bit of toast.

But the most delightful touch of all was when the Prince came up into her room afterwards to discuss bowling with me (their eldest son, Prince Christian Victor, was a first-rate cricketer). As he went away, giving his wife a solemn poke

in the ribs, he said, ' Yes, my dear ! as we agreed yesterday it is the pr-r-r-rivilege of *people who are getting old* to be a little cross and unreasonable sometimes.' At this, I, who had no doubt as to what particular ageing person he was referring to, laughed undisguisedly. So did she, but as the door closed behind him she remarked without hesitation : ' You see, dear, he knows *perfectly well* how cross and unreasonable he has been lately ! '—a rapid flank movement which I thought masterly ; but all royalties are trained to presence of mind.

How sorry I have often been to think that when two years afterwards Sir Henry died, and Norman Tower knew the Ponsonbys no more, my privileged connexion with that dear kindly household at Cumberland Lodge seems to have died a natural death.

The last time I saw Princess Christian was one day in 1918 when she came to lunch with the Empress Eugénie. During the first months of the war the line adopted towards this daughter of the old Queen and her family by a certain section of the public and of the Press ; the '*down with the Germans*' surreptitiously scrawled on their door ; the flinging overboard of one of the best sailors we had, Prince Louis of Battenberg . . . these are things that will for ever haunt some of us. She once showed an old friend a letter she had just got beginning ' You bl—dy old woman '—she, whose eldest son had died in one of our wars—she, who worked so hard for the Red Cross (being one of the few members of the committee who never missed a meeting) and other schemes for doing good, that when she died, so one who knows tells me, it was difficult to find people enough to undertake what she had done single-handed ! Prince Christian always pointed out that he was a *Dane*, dragged willy-nilly under the German flag when Schleswig-Holstein was annexed ; but Bismarck insisted that one of his two sons must belong to the German army. Hence it came that when the Great War broke out, to the anguish

of his parents the second son, Prince Albert, had to fight against England ! But in this matter the German Emperor showed good feeling and decided he should be sent to the Russian front (where, I believe, he was told off to do hospital work).

But in those hideous times no mercy was shown to his parents. The Prince had died in 1917, and when I saw his widow that day at luncheon and noted the ravages of pain on a countenance hitherto so serene, so cheerful, so obviously at peace with the world, for the time being I hated England. Of course the feeling wore off by degrees ; one learned to accept the shame as one accepts a defacing scar on a beloved face ; and if certain memories one would gladly forget are revived here, it is as reminder that war brings worse things in its train than physical wounds and death.

CHAPTER XII

(SPRING AND SUMMER 1893)

ON March 10 Lady Ponsonby and Maggie were to start for Italy where Sir Henry would be in attendance on his Sovereign, who had either rented or been lent *Villa Palmieri* at Florence. The Queen was not particularly fond *in practice* of over-great devotion between married couples attached to her Court, but Lady Ponsonby did not always choose to deprive her husband of the relaxation of private life when he was on duty. On this occasion, however, it was intimated to her that her presence in Florence would be welcome. The legend of her alarming cleverness, based, so she always declared, on her habit of reading the leading articles in *The Times*, sometimes came in useful. Plenty of clever people were sure to be about in Florence, and her Royal Mistress was probably glad to have her brilliant former Maid of Honour within hail.

As no one ever knew how long the Queen would remain anywhere the stay might well be prolonged, so I ran down to Osborne Cottage for a week-end to say good-bye.

This was the first time I had landed plumb in the centre of the family circle, and my recollections of that brief sojourn are strangely vivid. What happened? Nothing particular, except that every topic that came in sight was pounced upon and tossed to and fro in such characteristically Ponsonby fashion that one thought of a street scene hastily sketched by Rembrandt or someone of that calibre, so firmly does strong drawing fix things in your memory.

Something similar went on at the Bensons—the liveliness, the cleverness, the fun—but over all, even when he was not present, hung for me the dread shade of His Grace. Had I then known that once Mrs. Benson had said, ‘As your father’s away we’ll have a treat to-night; *we won’t have prayers!*’ the Lambeth atmosphere would have weighed on me less alarmingly, but Fred Benson did not release this anecdote until both his parents were dead. In any case, too, the Benson table-talk was of a different quality. The Bensons were highly intellectual, the Ponsonbys above all things extremely human specimens of humanity; now dominated by Maggie’s wild fantastic humour, now by her mother’s razor-blade caustic spirit—on this occasion tempered with sledge-hammer Sancho Panza pronouncements from Johnny Ponsonby which came in wonderfully in a discussion that raged at dinner that night over ‘The Souls.’

The Souls were a bouquet of the most exquisite growths produced in the upper reaches of London Society. Their political and intellectual high priest was Mr. Arthur Balfour, and much to my surprise it appeared that Mr. Spencer Lyttelton, a delightful man who really loved and went in for music, but of course only as an amateur, was their supreme authority in matters musical. There is a reason for everything. When Madame Neruda, for whom Lady Ponsonby and her sister Lady Revelstoke had a special veneration, married a man so much older than herself as Sir Charles Hallé, Lady Ponsonby’s maid, much shocked, remarked: ‘I suppose it was the *Lady Ally* that did it.’ In the case of Mr. Lyttelton, I imagine it was his relationship to half the Souls (and also to Hubert Parry) that ‘did it,’ but to me, with my austere German views of amateurs, his elevation to the pontificate seemed fantastic.

The group had its own catchwords and jargon, which, to one who like myself only occasionally touched the outer fringe of their orbit, was provoking, this irritation being partly the result of a constitutional dislike of all cliques,

whether ecclesiastical, musical, literary or sporting (Proust has nailed such to the counter with three sharp tin-tacks, 'le petit clan') and partly jealousy, for Betty Montgomery, Lady Ponsonby's eldest daughter, to whom I was much attached, was a Soul. Doubtless too, although I had neither time, money, nor desire to cut a dash on that stage, I harboured subterranean feelings akin to those I made a clean breast of in a former chapter, when I suffered under the consciousness of being among elegant people and not well dressed ! I don't quite know how such feelings should be classified ; perhaps they are merely part of a faculty for seeing things as they are, a sort of sensitiveness not wholly made up of envy, malice and all uncharitableness. Indeed the only reprehensible thing about it is perhaps being ashamed of having these feelings !

Meanwhile at her end of the table Lady Ponsonby was insisting that The Souls were the 'fine fleur' of Society, intellectually and otherwise ; that nothing is more natural and inevitable than that 'sommités' should automatically form a group (like the giants in the Bernese Alps), and that the recalcitrant attitude of Maggie and myself towards them was stupid and rather vulgar. 'Perhaps so,' said Maggie, 'but' (turning to me) 'it's a pity you weren't here the other day when Hilda B. told us that the *Intermezzo* in the Cavalleria made her spine open and shut.' (Lady Hilda B. was a prominent but musically innocent Soul.) 'You should have seen Mama's face,' Maggie went on, 'when she said to Hilda, "I am glad you made that remark to me and not to Spencer Lyttelton!"' So, after all, Spencer Lyttelton really *was* their Court of Appeal, and Lady Ponsonby, who was rather the slave of The Souls (which doubtless in part explained my severe judgment of them), and who could not resist success of any kind—a reproach I often hurled at her—saw no reason why an amateur should not be an Art-Overlord ! . . . Well, well !

Here Johnny, who up to that moment had rather sided

with Maggie and me, suddenly whipped round and declared Hilda B.'s remark was not so silly as all that, for the *Intermezzo* was the most beautiful piece of music ever written ; could I possibly deny it ? I could and did, and as dinner was now over he commanded me to come at once to the piano and play it to them. This I refused to do, saying I was sick to death of it, but he was not one to accept defeat, and early next morning I did my hair to the strains of the *Intermezzo*, suddenly blared forth from a barrel organ chartered by him and stationed beneath my window to perform this *aubade* ; a characteristic exhibition of energy and resource, for the whole thing must have been arranged between 11 P.M. and 7.30 A.M. !

While Lady Ponsonby was away I had one or two curious meetings with Mrs. Benson, who declared I was changed—quite different to what I had been hitherto ; what was the reason ? I said I had no idea. She then casually mentioned Lady Ponsonby ; I had made rather friends with her, hadn't I ? So Arthur had told her ; a very delightful woman wasn't she ? I replied as generally as possible, shrinking from discussing my new friend, much as four years ago I had shrunk from discussing the religious crisis at Munich—a reticence to which I think Mrs. Benson was unaccustomed in her women friends. However, I gave a few non-committal indications ; said, for instance, that under that polished, strongly-controlled exterior was a spirit which sat as loosely to conventional laws as any I had come across. (This sufficiently astonished Mrs. Benson. To have added that in passionate, elemental natures this is often so would have been giving away a secret.)

Evidently she felt reserve and reluctance in the air and presently said : ' I see you don't *want* to talk about her.' This I admitted, adding that I knew she hated being discussed. ' Ah ! ' said that shrewdest of women, ' but that's not the whole reason ; it's something in *you* that's

holding you back.' I protested, till at last, half in fun, she said, 'O all right! I shall discuss *you* with Lady Ponsonby when we meet!' to which I rejoined, 'By all means!' adding that I looked on being discussed as rather a compliment.

What interested me was that in the past year there had been, as she knew, plenty of *engouements*—concessions to what Harry called 'a beautiful gift with a touch of tipsiness in it.' These she evidently brushed aside as of no importance, while feeling that elsewhere something fundamental had occurred. But I could not expatiate. At one moment she asked whether Lady Ponsonby had 'a sense of sin.' How sharply I remembered a remark she had made not long ago, that if you fall down, the only thing to do is to pick yourself up as quick as you can, brush off the mud, and make a fresh start. But to Mrs. Benson I only said, 'I suppose so. Surely everyone has that?' Not for her quite a satisfactory interview, I fear, but it drew us closer together, for afterwards she told Arthur that she found me more likeable (and 'interesting!') than before!

Again she repeated her old belief that I should die young. I couldn't get her to say why she thought so, but I fancy it was because I so often protested that being slow of development I wanted *plenty of time*, therefore refused to make up my mind about lots of things. And as between me 'of the one part,' and the female Bensons 'of the other part' there reigned ever a contradictory spirit, perhaps this melancholy forecast was a way of saying 'Aha! but *you won't have plenty of time!* You'll die young.' Apart from that she believed in presentiments, and always had this odd one about me.

On my birthday, April 23, I had informed Harry by letter that Bob would be home in fifteen days after three years' absence in India, and seeing how things turned out

it is amusing to find I described him thus : ' He was perfectly delightful when he went away, and I do hope a cavalry regiment won't have deteriorated him. Being a born philosopher and the only male in a group of six rather masterful elder sisters, he was too little inclined to manliness, and though regimental life will have cured that I hope it won't have destroyed the fibre. I am full of curiosity. He always was a very fine rider, the pluckiest of the plucky at anything demanding dash and bravery, yet disinclined to taking the initiative in other ways.'

He arrived just before dinner, a far less boyish-looking fellow than when he went away and as delightful as ever ; no coarsening whatsoever of fibre. And if my father had any premonition of rocks ahead, I for one should not have suspected it, for he was in great form and recounted with delight an adventure he had had that morning as Chairman of an Institution for distressed and slightly mad gentlewomen. I think it must have had some connexion with the army, for the old Duke of Cambridge, then Commander-in-Chief, had been inspecting the establishment, and to one of the patients, a rather personable lady of a certain age, he had remarked : ' I am sure my old friend General Smyth does everything he can to make you comfortable.' ' *General* indeed !' said the patient. ' What *I* want to know is what he did with my under-linen.' The Duke's delight may be imagined.

Alas ! before many days had elapsed, the clouds that were to darken my father's last summer began gathering overhead, by degrees, for such things are never sprung suddenly on parents and guardians ; it became manifest that Bob's financial situation was far from satisfactory.

I think the blame lay partly at my father's door. The great idea of all parents of his generation was that daughters must be hustled into matrimony and sons into a profession with the minimum of delay ; and perhaps Papa, a tremendous optimist, had accepted too readily the assurances

of old friends at the War Office that this latest addition to our Cavalry Brigade, the 21st Hussars,¹ was not an extravagant regiment. Nothing is more difficult than to obtain reliable information about anything whatsoever—from subjects of legitimate inaccuracy, such as incomes, debts, and love affairs, down to the number of the Tooting bus—and it turned out that Bob's regiment was rather on the fast side. Unfortunately poor Bob knew nothing whatever about life on those lines, and his regimental nickname, 'Rosy'—still affectionately used by surviving brother officers and their wives—indicates a certain greenness which took, among other forms, that of backing horses to an extent I myself only became aware of quite lately! The long and short of it was that he now informed my father that his allowance must be increased by at least £100 a year.

This was impossible unless Frimhurst were given up. But Papa was seventy-eight, had been accustomed to big rooms all his life and would hate moving into one of the villa-ish residences that were already springing up on all sides. Times had changed since his own rigorous youth, but he was convinced that, with self-control, Bob could make his allowance do; to which Bob's reply was that the thing was impossible. And with the ruthless directness of a very young man in a very tight place he would add, 'If you can't allow me enough to live in it, why did you put me into an expensive regiment?'

Of course it is easy now to reconstruct the whole situation; how this Benjamin no sooner got his head than he proceeded to lose it—how, being a small man, he overlooked the fact that if anything this is rather an advantage in some ways in a cavalry regiment, and felt it incumbent on him to prove his virility; forgetting, too, that many people, for instance Napoleon, and Lord Roberts, were no bigger than Bob Smyth, and yet did pretty well!

A period of endless arguments, accusations, refutations,

¹ Later they were turned into Lancers.

consultations with other soldiers and with lawyers set in, which somewhat toned down one's immense joy in the prodigal's return. We did not then realise to what extent he had played the fool in India, but my own life having perforce been conducted on lines of consistent economy I knew all about the effort it demands, and could not help wondering whether Bob was a good hand at resisting temptation? As H. B. remarked when they met later on, his jaw was strong, and his mouth, even when the teeth knocked out at polo had been replaced, weak; and though in the end the jaw won the day, at that time it was even betting on either feature.

Meanwhile I had come to feel the deepest admiration for my father, and was wholly preoccupied with the tragedy of his being asked to grow a new shell in his old age—a tragedy to which Bob, secretly writhing in the grip of his commitments, seemed inexplicably indifferent. Wholeheartedly, even violently on Papa's side, yet not in a position to say or do anything to the point at that stage, it seemed a good idea to transport oneself into a pleasanter atmosphere and pay one or two of those visits for which I seldom had much inclination because they upset work, but which certainly enlarged my knowledge of English types.

Of these jaunts, all in the south-west of England, the one that impressed me most was a visit to Ston Easton near Bath, the home of my fourth brother-in-law, Dick Hippisley, R.E. The family had owned that property for hundreds and hundreds of years, and I feel certain that their history is typical as proving that nothing but a determination to avoid walks of life where, in past centuries, heads were cut off and bodies blown to pieces, makes such prolonged and untroubled possession of property possible. During the Wars of the Roses, during the interminable struggles with France and Spain, we hear of no Sir John Hippisley (the family name seems to have been John) swarming up

the Tree of Fame, determined to tie his pennon to the top branch or break his neck in the attempt. In the south-west corner of England there were countless powerful convents, but never a Prioress of the Hippisley stock addicted to extravagant displays of austerity, or leading her nuns in revolt against the Bishop. Challenged by me, my brother-in-law is able to produce a certain Sir John Hippisley, friend of Charles II and the Duke of Buckingham, who attained the safe eminence of Ranger of Bushey Park. Another Sir John was England's representative at the Vatican, and successfully wheedled his government into pensioning Henry Stuart, Cardinal of York (younger brother of the late Pretender, Prince Charles Edward), who was now senior representative of the House of Stuart, and penniless. I think Dick Hippisley may be proud of this ancestor, for judging by the annals of the time Sir John must have had his work cut out for him dragging that pension out of the Georgian Parliament.

But the most interesting and unexpected Hippisley was yet a third John, contemporary of the Minister to the Vatican, who took to the stage, rose from the position of 'Candle Snuffer' at Covent Garden Theatre to one of some eminence in dramatic art, and ended by owning the Theatre Royal at Bath in the days of Beau Brummell. One cannot help wondering how the Head of the House, resident a few miles off at Ston Easton Park, felt about this very unlikely appendage to his County Family dignity and respectability.

Dick's father, generally called 'the Squire,' whose hospitality I enjoyed that summer, was like an old man out of a novel. Immensely scientific and an F.R.S., he had carried on the family tradition of eschewing ambition. By nature an inventor, all he invented nowadays was clips and hangers made of odds and ends of old wire—a misuse of his really distinguished powers that greatly provoked my sister Violet who was all for people grasping opportunity by the forelock, and apt in moments of irritation to allude

to her father-in-law as 'old Mr. What's-his-name.' But personally I delighted in his simple and ingenious gadgets, some of which I have in use to this day.

One manifestation of his whimsical character stirred my imagination when I heard of it. Like all his race, including my brother-in-law—and I believe his grandson, the present owner of Ston Easton—he was a mathematician and an astronomer, and many years ago had built an observatory in the park. One night, after a short absence from home, a spirit in his feet led him thither, but as he turned the key it broke in the lock. This so annoyed him that he refused to summon a locksmith and took a dislike to the place, which ever since had squatted ingloriously in the park—buried in weeds, smothered in creepers, and hermetically sealed! My brother-in-law had given up asking for permission to effect an entry and when I urged him to pretend I was an ardent star-gazer and make one more attempt, he declared he really hadn't the courage!

The Hippisleys always moved into their fine house in Pulteney Street, Bath, for the winter—somewhat to the relief, I expect, of Mrs. Hippisley, who was not a 'recluse' nor a 'character,' but just a sociable old lady who would have enjoyed a little more movement in life than was to be had in the country. At the time of our visit she was very deaf and naturally all the more hungry for news—a hunger which Violet, who was the kindest and most affable of young women . . . and O how pretty and amusing she was! . . . did her best to satisfy during her brief sojourns at Ston Easton. But sometimes the news got distorted in the transit, and overhearing her mother-in-law passing on hair-raising scandals, Violet would rush across the room and explain that she had not said that the Prince of Wales *bit* his horse hard on the neck every time it stumbled but that he *hit* it hard on the neck. Or again, 'No, no, Mrs. Hippisley! the charwoman didn't *smother* her niece's illegitimate baby . . . she *mothered* it!' And poor old

Mrs. Hippisley, for ever finding the point of her anecdotes blanketed, said one day : ' I believe, my dear, that deaf people ought never to speak.'

That spring I received one of those shocks that for the time being disintegrate the present scene ; shocks from which I only became exempt many years later, when, in writing the book of which this is the sequel, somehow or other I emerged from what had seemed to be an interminable tunnel of pain.

As related in a former chapter, one day various belongings left in Germany once more came into my hands, among them a packet of all the letters Lisl had ever written me. I re-read one or two, but it hurt too much and I locked them away in an iron box, as in a tomb. Another shock occurred in the following year, when the Empress Eugénie, with whom I was staying at Cap Martin, driving through San Remo suggested I should walk through the cemetery with her and her nephew ; ' C'est tellement joli là-bas,' she said, ' sous les pins.' But I knew that Lisl lay under those pines and stayed in the carriage. And then a month later, turning the leaves of a ' Hildebrand Album ' at Munich, I suddenly came across a reproduction of the medallion he had carved for her gravestone, and quickly turned the page.

This spring came the worst pang of all—worst, because with the pain were mingled bitterness and anger. A letter arrived from Mary Fiedler enclosing on behalf of Herzogenberg a photograph of Lisl together with a card on which he had written, in German of course : ' Think of this angel and of me with feelings of old friendship.'

The nature of this Austrian nobleman endowed with an astonishing gift for counterpoint, who had taught me all I knew about that department of music, singularly fitted him to be the husband of Lisl. Of passion there was not an ounce in his composition, nor the faintest desire

to peep over the rim of live craters ; indeed he instinctively looked the other way. But though masked and corrected by good breeding and sense of humour, sentimentality was his key-note. He had recently made over to Mary Fiedler the hundreds of letters I had written to his wife during the eight years of our friendship (after all then she had not had the heart to destroy them !) and as Mary could be very ruthless at times, perhaps some comment of hers had resulted in this gesture of reconciliation.

But I knew he had been rather relieved—which perhaps was natural—at my disappearance from their scene, and when they had stayed with the Fiedlers on that journey to San Remo from which Lisl never returned, he had, as I have related, specially begged Mary not to mention my name because it agitated her. But now everything was to be bathed in a roseate mist and the era of all round forgetting and embracing ushered in ! On the same lines, soon after Lisl's death, the Hildebrands, who had worked our doom both with Julia and the Herzogenbergs, began sending olive-branch messages to Harry, expressing the kindest feelings towards him (also to me !) evidently counting on a proximate reconciliation. In all these advances I saw a desire to compound with a bad conscience ; and if Herzogenberg or any of them thought the slate could be wiped clean whenever it suited their convenience, they were mistaken. I was glad to know Harry had merely replied that they were leaving Florence because he disliked being in the same town as ‘ friends of his wife whom he declined to meet.’

I got an interesting letter from him on the subject of forgiveness. ‘ There is something in your attitude towards Herzogenberg,’ he wrote, ‘ that reminds me of my own towards the Hildebrands. I can reason all resentment away and say to myself, “let bygones be bygones.” Then comes a feeling of impoverishment, a sort of obscure warning that there is in our nature a necessity for feud that must be

expressed somewhere. Perhaps a lot of bad temper comes from not having enemies. And we cannot invent them ; there must be some good reason. If we have got one it may be well to think twice before throwing it away. We can quite well forgive them in eternity and while we are subject to the mechanism of time keep them as buffers for the exercise of our extensor pushing-away muscles. People who are very tolerant intellectually like you and me perhaps need this more than anybody ; at least it is only in this roundabout way that I can forgive myself for not forgiving everything and everybody, since "tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner."

Later on, after Julia's death, when I used to spend part of most winters in Rome, my implacability relaxed. But at the present moment Herzogenberg's step merely roused scorn and indignation. I made no response, and when the letters came into my possession put them together with Lisl's in the iron box—not to open it again till fifteen years later.

CHAPTER XIII

(SPRING AND SUMMER 1893)

FOR some inexplicable reason many of Lady Ponsonby's early letters (and all of 1894) have disappeared. But among the very earliest one survives in which she remarks, 'If the old feel like the young *tant pis*; let them be silent'—a characteristic bit of wisdom, expressed with characteristic terseness, that ageing but incurably temperamental people can meditate to their advantage.

One of her letters from Venice recalls a small triumph over one who, though most generously appreciative of her friends' merits, could seldom be cajoled into paying you a direct compliment just when you wanted it. 'Walking about San Marco' (she wrote) 'I remembered reading somewhere a rather clever remark to the effect that it makes you realise what Christ felt like walking on the sea. Do you happen to know who said that?' With much gratification I replied that the remark was spoken, and that the name of the speaker was that of her present correspondent! I suppose that by now the floor of San Marco has been made as level as a billiard table, but if so, I daresay many think with regret of former breakneck stumbles in that golden gloom.

Thanks to her stay in Italy, which lasted till May, Lady Ponsonby was spared witnessing one tragedy, one aftermath of the failure of the Baring Bank—the sale of the London house and its contents. I believe 37 Charles Street is now some sort of Institution—a place consecrate to the

delivery of extra clever lectures and discourses, but in 1893 London was mourning the passing of that lovely house in which so much hospitality, so much music, and so much laughter had spent itself.

I remember, long before I had become intimate with her, Lady Ponsonby telling me about her sister's almost religious feeling as regards music—about her musical parties at which those *sotto voce* conversations that are so much more characteristic of London musical parties than rapt attention to the music were gently nipped in the bud, and an example set of which many hostesses were still in need. Some of the indignities that used to enrage Madame Schumann ten or fifteen years ago—such as penning up the performers in a certain part of the room by a crimson cord which it was death to pass—were no longer inflicted, but in many houses the artists were only allowed to enter by the back stairs, and I remember an amusing conversation about it between the Henschels.

MRS. H. : No, don't come with me to Lady Ardilaun's to-night, George ; it is *infra dig.* for you to go up the back stairs !

H. : My dear, I hope nothing I do *can* be *infra dig.*, besides which if you can do it I can !

MRS. H. : But I'm paid thirty guineas to do it and you get no reward !

H. : Well, that makes it more *infra dig.* for you than for me I should think !

The spirit of this remark was the sort of thing that made one so devoted to Henschel.

By now I had made friends with the eldest Baring daughter, Elizabeth Castlerosse. She and her cousin Bessie Bulteel were, I think, their aunt's favourite nieces ; anyhow I know that although delighting in Elizabeth I was a little jealous of her ! But jealousy can cut two ways ; it either poisons or fans your feeling for the third person, and I can

truthfully say that in my own case it always had the latter effect. A few days before the Charles Street sale I lunched there with Elizabeth, and remember the tragic effect of those trestles covered with red baize on which were heaped all the beautiful things the house contained. The last time they had been used, so she told me, was for her wedding presents ! What she minded most, I thought, was the idea of her father beginning life again in a small house in the suburbs—the same sad preoccupation that was to be mine ere long. But the way she touched on these matters—with a quiet pain and courage utterly devoid of mock heroism—moved me strangely.

Later on I made still greater friends with her next sister, Margaret Spencer, who was a student at the Royal College of Music and carried on with her lessons after her marriage. Thus I was able to answer first-hand a question of the Empress Eugénie, whose banker was Messrs. Baring and who had been on terms of friendship with the Revelstokes for many years. By some twist in her nature she had what seemed to me an odd respect for money, and apparently had often wondered how the crash had reacted on the family alliances. I could only testify that if you searched the world you could not find two more devoted and perfectly assorted couples than the Spencers and the Castlerosses.

I think it was realising the way the whole family—including those I knew only by hearsay—faced up to disaster, that gave me a feeling about all Barings which I have never lost, and which was deepened by the perusal of Maurice Baring's autobiography, 'The Puppet Show of Memory.' Looking backwards it seems to me only natural that, as the years went by, Maurice should develop into an author I am never tired of reading ; should pursue a chosen path through life, to watch him moving down which is a never failing delight to me—also a matter of endless curiosity. In a word, was it thinkable that he who so

utterly understood and appreciated (and was understood and appreciated by) Harry Brewster should *not* have become one of the two or three supreme friends I have possessed?

.

That spring my old enemy the Archbishop, to whom nevertheless I was fatally drawn (as are sinners to saints and rash mortals to caged lions) suddenly showed himself, as occasionally happened, in such an engagingly human light, that once more my inward weathercock whirled round from north to due south. And the cause was the appearance of the celebrated, or if you like notorious, book 'Dodo' by his son Fred—to-day the well-known author E. F. Benson.

I am not sure when, exactly, Miss Margot Tennant first leapt upon and electrified the London stage, but in the spring of 1893 everything and everybody lay prone before her. And how and why it thus happened must be obvious to anyone who has read her autobiography; surely one of the most alive documents extant—a mirror which gives back (more especially in the hunting sections) the very incarnation of vitality in the shape of a daring and brilliant young girl. 'Dodo' herself was admittedly a *fantasia* on Margot Tennant, and though it was only occasionally and by chance that I set foot in the exalted spheres dominated by 'Dodo,' in the book I found myself permanently installed there as her candid friend Edith Staines—a young lady who ate eggs and bacon on the lid of her piano while composing;—no mean feat, by the by, and scarcely motivated, unless perhaps she was setting to music one of Theocritus's Eclogues, which are spelt in Germany, where Edith Staines had pursued her studies, *Eglogues*).

Lady Ponsonby's reaction to this book was extremely funny. Most of the people who composed 'Dodo's' set were, in real life, either related to Ponsonbys or younger members of families they had consorted with since time was; and, as I have hinted elsewhere, though at times

herself more than '*cassant*' (as she would have put it) on the subject of society foibles, it was not only from spirit of contradiction that she defended these 'fair women and brave men' when anyone else attacked them. But what she utterly drew the line at was that one not born in '*le petit clan*' should venture, however cleverly, to ridicule or parody anyone it had elected to stamp with what in other moods she herself derisively called '*The Government Seal*.'

To me she wrote with superb M. E. P. irony and arrogance: 'You, my dear Ethel, no doubt know a great deal more about good society than I do, but really I have never met anyone who said to her sister: "As I am going to be a Marchioness the least you can do is to behave like an Honourable"!'

Myself I thought this an amusing bit of parody, and, sticking up for my friend Fred, ventured to point out that '*Dodo*' had said this in fun. 'O yes,' replied Lady Ponsonby, 'I really am capable of perceiving that this was meant as a joke, but let me tell you . . .' and here followed sarcasms in such unadulterated M. E. P. vein that I forbear quoting them! (Many still refer to her by her initials M. E. P.—that is, Mary Elizabeth Ponsonby.)

The connection of all this with the Archbishop was as follows. One day I received an invitation to dine at Lambeth, coupled with a request from Mrs. Benson to come if I possibly could. Only once or twice in my life was the honour of *dining* there vouchsafed me, but I think I am right in saying that though wine was served, to my wrath the butler only offered it to distinguished, elderly, or infirm males. On this occasion, when I entered the drawing-room—always to me a knee-shaking experience—His Grace, rapidly advancing to meet me, much to my mingled terror and gratification almost embraced me, and throughout the evening was—if an expressive vulgarism be permitted—'all over me' to such an extent, that I wondered if someone

had told him I was smitten with a mortal disease, and that these were symptoms of remorse? Anyhow I know that in my agitation I must have said 'awfully' again and again—according to him one of my most objectionable traits—but this time without producing a certain well-known facial contraction.

As I went away, 'What on earth,' I whispered to Mrs. Benson 'made the Archbishop so amiable to me to-night?' and she explained it was because he fancied I might have been hurt about 'Edith Staines'—whom, however, I considered, as Fred himself had said she was, the one decent character in the book!

Touched by this motion of the archiepiscopal spirit, I noted how splendidly handsome he looked in evening dress; in fact that night I found what I had long been searching for, a *pendant* to Lady Ponsonby in a game invented by Miss Geraldine Liddell called 'Bedding Out.' The idea was to select any two of one's acquaintance who would look well side by side in a large four-post bed, and mentally visualise the result. Inspired by Landseer's picture 'Dignity and Impudence' someone had bedded out Mr. Gladstone with Mrs. Benson herself; but on lines of homogeneity, not of contrast, the Archbishop and Lady Ponsonby, whose grave massive features were in each case irradiated by wonderful eyes, was a combination hard to beat.

In June, Harry, still wrestling with domicile problems in Rome, came over on the rush to deposit Clotilde at Cambridge for some examination connected with her impending entrance at Newnham. Up to that time she was not supposed to know anything definite about the triangle Harry—Julia—Ethel, and what she might have gathered would of course have been picked up in the enemy's camp from her grandmother Baroness v. Stockhausen, her uncle Ernest, Lisl's insanely jealous brother (who we

now learned had been mischief-maker in chief), and the belatedly repentant Hildebrands. But now Harry decided to initiate her, and a more generous, intelligent comprehension was never brought to bear on such a case by a daughter who might have been jealous, for she was absolutely devoted to her father. In fact, that most original of beings, Clotilde, at once became what she will always be—one of my best and most sympathetic friends ; and later on a trio was made of it by her delightful husband, Percy Feilding, who alas ! died untimely a few years ago. One of the things I am specially grateful for is the relation that always subsisted between myself and H. B.'s two children. It might have been so different.

In my own family it gave me pain to feel on the occasion of this short visit, that, as I suppose was only natural, three of my sisters' husbands lined up with my father in disapproval (on principle) of Harry—a married man on terms of close though undefined intimacy with their very unconventional sister-in-law. Dick Hippisley, a really cultivated being, had of course no prejudices of that kind ; but he and Violet were still living at Frimhurst, though to the distress of my father they would be leaving in October. And Violet told me to tell Harry, I am sure with sincerity, that one reason for rejoicing in the thought of having a house of her own was that he would be free of it. Of course the cessation of the Hippisley quota to the cost of running Frimhurst clinched the matter of letting the place as soon as possible, and I fancied my father was getting reconciled to the idea.

Meanwhile Harry and I had various meetings in London diversified with gallops in Windsor Park, and I got a letter from Arthur Benson telling me he had lunched with him at Edmund Gosse's 'in very intelligent company.' I afterwards discovered that the guests included among others, Pater, Hardy (a great disappointment ; Harry professed to feel in his personality and physical appearance the

element that checked unreserved admiration of his books), Lord de Tabley, and 'the inevitable Jew.' Again Arthur and Harry got on. The latter's comment was—and for him that was an extravagantly warm statement—'I liked Benson, and he is so handsome that it is a pity he is not a soldier or a Viking'; and Arthur wrote, 'What struck me was how easily and unmistakably Brewster towered above the rest of the party'—a thing that in later life, when there was no longer any necessity to avoid our appearing in public together, I was to notice again and again.

From my point of view, the moment of this short visit to England was unfortunate, because I was working hand over fist to get *Fantasio* into a presentable state for Levi, whom I might perhaps see in the autumn. But one great aim was accomplished; a meeting between Harry and Lady Ponsonby was pulled off, in spite of various difficulties raised by her, the latest of which—temporary disfigurement owing to an accident—I had to allow was valid.

One of her adorable traits was a sort of affective modesty that made her shy away, if she was fond of you, from meeting people whose lives were closely intertwined with yours. In her angle towards these stray cards plucked by you with passion from the random pack life swirls out under your eyes—cards on which you stake your fortune—there was no tinge of arrogance, of the 'don't care,' who, in the nursery rhyme, was so unjustly eaten up by a bear. In less crucial cases she declined to meet So-and-so simply because she scented boredom from afar—as when Betty and Maggie had vainly urged her to meet the 'Contrapuntalist'; besides which she might well declare her life was full enough already. To this order of reluctance belonged a marked absence of desire (to put it mildly) to meet any of my family. She well knew the part they played in my life, but if I was foolish enough to dwell for half a second on their attractiveness, the non-conducting look that instantly

invaded her singularly expressive countenance almost made one laugh.

At first this had rather infuriated me, because for so many, many years, when most people thought I was a conceited self-deluded fool, these sisters had believed in and stood by me. So that now, when the tide seemed turning, I was perhaps irrationally jealous for my family. But I soon grasped that, being as she was, and given her circumstances, this feeling of hers was only natural, and what had never really been resented ended by amusing me. After all she and they frequented different worlds, and everyone's time (and zeal) is limited. Or, at least, nearly everyone's, for to this day, meeting someone that interests me, I would often like to take a look at his or her friends; even an arresting book will awaken desire to investigate, if only briefly, the author's circumstances. But I have lived long enough to learn that this trait is not universal.

The reluctance of Lady Ponsonby to make Harry's acquaintance was a genuine case of 'affective modesty.' The incipient dislike I spoke of had yielded to treatment, and she also knew that both Arthur Benson and Edmund Gosse thought highly of him. Besides this she had been carried away by 'The Prison' and I had been at pains to read her, here and there, passages from his letters calculated to break down lingering vestiges of *parti pris*. On the other hand there were points about our friendship that did not meet her views, notably, as indicated above, the sublimation insisted on by me which she considered unfair to him, and I daresay his acquiescence provoked her. But the real hindrance was now her conviction that *he* would not like *her*; also I daresay she wondered whether the ardour of my affection for herself would rouse his jealousy.

Truth to tell, at one time I had put this question to him, for, considering the key in which my references to

her were pitched, nine out of ten men would have been jealous. But he was the tenth, and his reply ran :

‘There is not the faintest tinge of jealousy in me of your affection for Lady Ponsonby. It only makes me curious and sympathetic ; also eager to see this strange person who can hunt so successfully on my grounds without thinning off the game. Those are the good hunters.’

At last the meeting came off ; one day I took him to St. James’s to tea, and then left them to finish an argument, pleading a forgotten appointment elsewhere—a really happy improvisation. Counting the many years during which their relation though sporadic was compact of mutual respect and sympathy, it is interesting to reflect that, before they met, it began as far as she was concerned on the note recommended by Mrs. Malaprop, ‘a little aversion.’

Regarding the ‘sublimation,’ it always amuses me to recollect how later, when that stage had been left behind and Julia was dead, Lady Ponsonby remarked one day : ‘I cannot understand why you and Mr. Brewster don’t marry and have done with it.’ When I passed on this remark to Harry he replied, referring to our mutual lack of talent for matrimony : ‘Tell her we don’t marry simply because we *don’t want to have done with it !*’ But though unable to gratify her in that respect, I like to think that in a letter written to me about a year before his death are the words, ‘The best thing you ever did in your life was annexing Mr. Brewster !’

CHAPTER XIV

(SUMMER 1893)

DURING the year 1893 a career opened out before me for which in truth I was predestined, given my knowledge of 'abroad' and of one or two of the languages there spoken—that of Universal Aunt. Mary Hunter was keen on her daughters becoming good linguists, and by way of tiding the eldest over what Maggie Ponsonby called the 'portez-moi le lo' stage of Anglo-French she had been sent to Paris after Christmas. Kitty was a serious-minded girl, with an innate sense of religion which I am glad to say life has not driven out of her, and one department of my Universal Aunt-dom had been drawing the Lambeth coverts for the right person to prepare her and her next sister, Phyllis, for their proximate confirmation.

Given Kitty's turn of mind it was not surprising that she began her Parisian life with horrified diatribes against 'French frivolity'—a state of mind obviously increased by an acute attack of homesickness. Our amazement therefore may be imagined when she came home in July (I have been too fond of those girls all my life to be afraid of saying it now) absolutely detestable, and far more taken up with the forty articles of the *Comédie Française* than with certain other thirty-nine articles, with which, as zealous member of the Church of England, she ought rather to have been preoccupied. Much to Harry's relief I myself was no longer the good Churchwoman I had been; writing the Mass seemed to have sweated religious, or at least dogmatic

fervour out of me. Yet Kitty's state of mind alarmed and slightly shocked me ; but one hoped that the thought of her approaching confirmation would have a steadying effect.

Though terribly busy I attended that ceremony, which so profoundly touched them that they presented me with . . . a golf-scoring book ! Though vastly entertained by this choice of a tribute, it did seem a little incongruous, and my letter of thanks appears to have taken rather a serious turn, its gist being that nothing matters much in life except betterness. But as (according to the recipients) in an asterisked footnote were added the words '*this also applies to golf*,' one hopes that the letter, though aunt-like, was not that of a prig.

Meanwhile, in order that Kitty might become as good at German as she now was at French, it was decided that in the autumn I should convoy her to Leipzig, where I knew the beloved old friends with whom I had always kept in touch would take her to their bosoms ; also that the Teutonic seriousness of these bosoms would counteract lingering traces (if any) of Parisian frivolity—a forecast which, as will be shown by and by, was fulfilled with staggering completeness. There was to be a Wagner Festival in Munich at the end of August, and as Kitty was very fond of music her generous mother decided to treat us to a circular tour to Leipzig, *via* Heidelberg, which I loved and which Kitty longed to see, and Munich. As Director of the Court Opera Levi would be conducting the Festival, and since our meeting was now a certainty, it behoved me to push along with *Fantasio* faster than ever.

I had a most diverting conversation about Opera in general at Farnborough Hill. The Empress and her old Dame d'Honneur knew rather less about music than my dog Marco, but because of de Musset, on whose play, as I said, the libretto was founded, they took an almost proprietary interest in this venture, and asked me, bless

them, what my Opera was like. I replied that it was quite on lines of my own (at these words a slightly distrustful expression passed over Madame le Breton's face) and anyhow it had been written with immense pleasure and desire. ¹ 'Si c'est bien ou mal,' I added, 'je ne sais pas, mais au moins ce sera intéressant.'

Madame le Breton rose at me, 'Mais ma chère,' she objected, rapping the table, 'si c'est mal—si c'est une horreur—cela ne sera point *intéressant*. Si c'est mauvais *comme opéra*, comment voulez vous que cela *intéresse* n'importe qui?' Here the Empress intervened with 'Mais non ! c'est bien possible que comme *opéra* ça ne réussisse pas, pourtant comme *œuvre d'art*. . . .' 'Ah ! laissez moi tranquille avec les œuvres d'art,' interjected the other. 'C'est *comme opéra* qu'on doit juger un opéra !' and so on, and so on. How I agree !

As for Madame le Breton's violence on this and other topics, how often I used to say to her : 'If I live to be your age, I only hope I shall be exactly like you.' 'Oh,' remarked Lady Ponsonby, when this aspiration was passed on to her, 'Then you don't take *me* as model ?' I explained that firstly she was not yet old enough (Madame le Breton must have been at least ten years her senior), and secondly that unlimited natural geniality is a necessary element in that particular manner, whereas though Lady Ponsonby disguised the fact admirably, she was at heart, as someone had said, 'splendidly *ungenial*.' To which she replied with emphasis, 'I hope and believe I am !'

At Farnborough Hill that day we arrived, I cannot imagine by what route, at the subject of Sapphism, concerning which the Empress in her very matter of fact style observed : 'Voilà une chose que je ne comprends pas !'

¹ E. S. 'I don't know if it's good or bad, but anyhow it will interest people.' Mme. le B. 'My dear, if it's hopelessly bad as opera it won't interest anybody.' H. M. 'But it may be unsuccessful *as opera*, yet as work of art . . .' Mme. le B. 'Don't talk to me about works of art ! It's *as opera* that one judges an opera.'

Moi je suis vieille, mais je vous donne ma parole d'honneur que si l'un me donnerait une femme je ne saurais qu'en faire ! Je dirais "très bien ! mais . . . *je . . . ne . . . sais . . . qu'en . . . faire !*" It was not till many years after that I heard H. B. discussing homosexuality with Countess Benckendorff, then Russian Ambassadors in London, and remarking that whereas in the case of two males he found 'l'outrage brutale' indefensibly ugly, in the case of two women, 'la femme étant un animal caressant,' his feeling was tolerant sympathy. But to elderly people like Her Majesty, whose sexual endowment was probably sparse to start with and who are not given to demonstrations of tenderness, a good many things must remain a mystery.

While in Italy Lady Ponsonby had embarked on what she called a 'new *culte*' for Vernon Lee, whose acquaintance she had made at Vernon's home-town, Florence ; and just before I went off to Germany came an invitation to meet her at luncheon at Norman Tower.

It was a delightful little party, consisting of our hostess's old friend Lord Ronald Gower, Lord Ronald's friend Doctor Axel Munthe—at that time practically unknown in England—Arthur Benson, Mr. Howard S——, a very literary and art-y man whose fat eyes rather repugated me, and two friends of Maggie's in both of whom I delighted, Freda Biddulph and Countess Feodora Gleichen the sculptor who afterwards became a great friend of mine.

The bright particular star of the party was of course Vernon, whom Harry, who had met her in Italy, had described as remarkably ugly, somewhat deficient in tact, rather oppressively clever, but a big person. This judgment has been confirmed in one of her characteristic phrases by Lady Ponsonby, who wrote from Florence : 'She says excellent things *à bâtons rompus*, but the wealth of her ideas when she develops a theory makes her, not confused, but so elaborate as to be difficult to follow.'

She was indeed ! and one soon noticed that the more Vernon desired to please the more overwhelmingly was the intellectual *mitrailleuse* brought to bear on the person in question. It was easy to see that she was completely under the charm of Lady Ponsonby, and I began to be sorry for her, knowing the sensitiveness of our hostess to the physical aspect of her friends and acquaintances. One divined at once what further knowledge confirmed, that poor Vernon was extravagantly sentimental, but though esteemed, admired, and cherished, had not the gift of inspiring love. I knew there had been a deep, warm, and reciprocal affection between her and the poetess Mary Robinson, now Madame Darmstaeter, but to-day it seemed difficult to imagine a sequel.

That these feelings of sympathy should have stirred in my heart was on the whole creditable, for Vernon began by turning up her nose at me and trying to make my remarks seem ridiculous—I think chiefly because when discussing subterranean subjects I had no command of the current jargon. However she relented later on, and by the time the coffee was handed round had graciously fallen in with my expressed hope that in September, when I came back from Germany, she would pay us a visit at Frimhurst ! (It was after that party that, seeing how well Arthur Benson and I hit it off, Maggie suggested to her mother that to placate the Archbishop she ought to make a match between me and Arthur.)

Just before Kitty and I started for Germany news reached me that Lady Ponsonby, who was then at Osborne, had been in rather a nasty carriage accident. By the same post came a characteristic letter from her about it :

‘ I am pleased at what you say,’ she wrote, ‘ of my facing fate as a friend and not as a foe. I think that is true. I don’t think it rouses a feeling of defiance in me, simply of acquiescence—much the same feeling as when the pole

of the carriage snapping the other day, we were on the brink of a rather bad accident and my pulse I am certain didn't beat one stroke quicker than usual. I simply got out of the carriage because ordered to do so by Henry, otherwise my inclination was to sit where I was and see what would happen. I think as you say it is from the habit of *making* myself face the inevitable and thinking the world and the people in it very tolerable after all.'

Nothing could be more characteristic of the writer than the above, but to get the full value out of this acquiescence one must read a postcard, written in what particular connection I do not remember, that reached me ten days later at Munich. 'The inevitable must be faced at my age either with or without groans. Do you suppose it is *pleasant* to be reduced to only dreaming you are having a fine reckless ride—dreaming that you see, hear, and feel as you might have done years ago? It requires much more courage to face the inevitable creeping on of years than to face death. And yet you pretend you don't see this because one does not howl!' The fact is, her mastery of life was so complete, and as is ever the case with mastery, apparently so effortless, that maybe one was inclined to forget at what cost it had been attained. Thus should it be with genius for life, or any form of genius; the agony and bloody sweat are not for public display. Montaigne has said something like that somewhere; I cannot find the place though I always hope to. But one passage I could put my finger on without much difficulty, and the reader will guess why I advance it here—the passage where, speaking of his great friend, he remarks, 'I could easily spend my life writing about La Boétie.'

About the middle of August Kitty and I started on our circular tour and stopped first at Amsterdam, where most of our time was spent with my old Leipzig friend, Julius Röntgen and his dear Swedish wife Amanda, whose

untrammelled lovemaking, as 'Brautpaar,' in his father's flat fifteen years ago had so startled my chaste English eyes. Julius was now Professor at the School of Music and had several children, one of whom, a curiously long-legged child of six, was already pre-dedicated to the double bass. They got us permission to view otherwise unviewable private collections, showed us amazing bits of old Amsterdam, and of course I played the Mass to Julius, with the result I had hoped for, and, to tell the truth, counted on. Of course too we embarked on day-trips to the Hague and Haarlem, and whoever travelled with me learned one thing—how to travel economically even when (as in this case) someone else was paying the piper. Our present benefactor, Kitty's mother, would in one day in London have spent more on creature comforts, cabs, meals, etc., than we did during a four days' stay in Holland! But that was as it should be if you are a daughter travelling with a Universal Aunt.

I always think the chief thing a North-European traveller must notice about Cologne, once the Cathedral has been duly disparaged as far less sympathetic than our own Gothic cathedrals, is that no matter where you are going to, you always have to spend from eight to twelve hours there in order to catch the connection. As, however, I meanwhile played the Mass to the head of the chief Choral Conductor and his understudy with the same results as at Amsterdam, the time didn't seem as wasted as usual.

We then proceeded, in heat that was breaking all records, to Heidelberg, and I don't suppose two decent gentlewomen ever consumed more glasses of iced Bavarian beer than did Kitty and I while banging along the noisiest, dustiest railway, surely, in the world. At our hotel I found a wire from Harry, saying that in obedience to a wildly thrown-out suggestion of mine (for he abominated Wagner) he and his friend Rod, the novelist, would be found at the Vier Jahreszeiten Hotel, Munich, when we should arrive there . . . O joy!

There were two dramatic happenings at Heidelberg, one physical, one spiritual. I have always stood heat badly, and when I left England I was overworked, with the usual result that, as our cook put it, my 'stomach was all over the place'; and no doubt the unlimited consumption of iced beer was stark lunacy. The evening of our arrival while ordering our dinner in the garden I felt very ill, but believed that by iron concentration on the giving of special directions for cooking the trout faintness could be warded off. These duly issued I took a header into a bush, and poor Kitty who was coming downstairs was met by an inanimate aunt being carried up them. It was an attack of something very like cholera, thanks to which we had to stay a day longer than we intended at Heidelberg, thereby missing *Rheingold*.

Next morning while I was still in bed the landlord came up himself to tell me that a lady downstairs, having seen my name in the visitors' book, had got wildly excited and said she positively must see me. And presently in came the oldest German friend I possessed, Frau Dr. Brockhaus, who, when as a young girl I landed in Leipzig, had been my all-in-all till Lisl appeared on the scene! That spring (1878) I had suddenly fallen desperately ill, hearing of which Frau Brockhaus who lived next door rushed over to nurse me as a matter of course—two minutes after which Lisl came in, and, equally as a matter of course took possession! I was very, very bad and only half remember the battle fought over the corpse-like form in the bed. But Frau Brockhaus, a sensitive Hungarian, soon saw how matters stood and left the field to Lisl. I was very fond of my first friend and above all most deeply grateful to her. She, mother of three boys, had longed in vain for a girl, and on me—much as had happened with Lisl—she had lavished a mother's tenderness. But I did not really love her, whereas she did love me, and the new situation cost her a good deal of pain. Nevertheless, being a very noble-hearted and intelligent woman, she accepted the fact that

if Lisl chose to stake out a claim other people could but yield, and throughout the rest of my Leipzig life had behaved splendidly about it. When I went back there in 1887, two years after the crash, her intellect was tottering, and since then part of her time had been spent in private asylums. She was now absolutely sane but knew that at times it was not so, and made one short heart-rending allusion to these periods of mental eclipse. As she sat on my bed—such a faithful, loving look on her face—I remembered with a pang that the last time she had thus sat was in my Leipzig attic fifteen years ago, and the past came over me with such violence that I thought my heart would stop beating. She did not mention Lisl's death—only asked in despair what had happened to my 'beautiful blond hair.' I explained that old age and dirt had darkened this and many another fair prospect. We never met again, but the tragedy of that chance *Wiedersehen* cut deep.

That evening I and my charge left for Munich, and there, by degrees, came to Kitty the revelation of German musicality, as we contrasted the spectacle of a rapt German public with what you saw at Covent Garden. And one reflected that the boots at our hotel would laugh at some of the remarks made to me during the Wagner Cycle last year by people like the Pope of the 'Souls' and others who were genuine music-lovers, but hopelessly untrained, amateurish and cocksure. Here, after our first Ring performance, when we came home on foot at 10 P.M.—such a sensible hour!—the porter of our humble hotel asked me as a matter of course, not in the least aware I was a musician, whether I liked the performance; and there ensued between us an all-round discussion as artistically sound, as comprehensive and as technical as an English hunting-man might have with his stud-groom about the horses. Afterwards I passed the gist of it on to Kitty who was thunderstruck. 'I *do* understand what you mean about Germany!' she exclaimed.

Harry and Rod were already installed at the smarter Vier Jahreszeiten, and though I liked Rod I soon felt we had not an idea in common. He was full of intelligence and *finesse* but a thorough-paced sentimentalist ; moreover, however charmingly an author puts up with it, if you neither know nor desire to know his books, it is always rather embarrassing, particularly when, which was Rod's case (O inexplicable fact !) he has a certain vogue.

I need hardly say that most of the daytime was spent at picture galleries, and as the heat was still tropical Kitty disported herself daily in the waters of that child of the glaciers, the Isar. And in spite of an undisguised horror of cold water I felt constrained to do the same, for I wasn't going to be outdone by Kitty ! She, however, was a strong swimmer, whereas I could only swim with my mouth an inch under water—a handicap of course. I just mention these diversions picked up on the wayside to show what fun it was being a Universal Aunt—specially if you had such a generous pay-mistress as my sister, and a niece who enjoyed it all as tremendously as Kitty.

The chief thing I remember about the Wagner Festival is that there for the first time I heard Ternina—one of the three really great dramatic sopranos who have appeared on the stage in my lifetime (the others being Reicher-Kindermann and Anna Mildeburg). Ternina was then young, slim and practically unknown and Levi suggested introducing me to her ; but not being a real Wagnerite (a thing he could never understand in me) I shied away from the honour.

Two or three days were yet to elapse before Levi would be free to listen to the music of *Fantasio* as far as it had got, but one day I read a synopsis of the libretto to him and a great Viennese connoisseur. Both the men knew every opera that had ever been written, and, as I had so often told friends in England, the story, the dramatic march of

events, is at least as important in music drama as the music, so this was an exciting moment. It would have been difficult to find two people more unreservedly approving. As for Harry and me, so green, so optimistic were we, that I was quite of his opinion when he said, 'Well, if after that the *music* pleases Levi, the thing should go *comme une lettre à la poste*.'

While waiting for the next stage, Kitty, Harry and I went off for two exquisite days to the Bavarian Alps, and took rooms in a peasant inn beside a sad, portentous, practically unknown lake. Tourists having not yet discovered this spot the attendance and food were practically non-existent, but much we cared! One day we rowed across the lake to make the acquaintance of a friend of Levi's called Baroness Belli (to English ears an unfortunate patronymic). This clever, ugly, and delightful woman gave us a wonderful supper, and at midnight, in dazzling moonlight, we glided home again, Harry and I rowing and Kitty steering. The water looked black as ink and the mountains as though fashioned of some unknown metal filched from the moon for that occasion only. On this Munich trip Kitty was beholding mountains for the first time, and we both agree that nothing we have seen since, or may yet see, can efface the memory of that night on the lake.

Next morning we went back to Munich, Harry departed for Rome, and, greatly to my satisfaction, Kitty remarked: 'I think that must be the nicest man in the world.' Of course she knew nothing about anything, and there seemed no reason for enlightening her, so I merely said—in fun as it were—'Of course he is, and that's why he is my greatest friend!'

One thing had arrested me. I had never passed on to Harry Mrs. Benson's comments on the improvement she professed to see in me since the friendship with Lady Ponsonby, but now he made the same remark on his own. 'It is difficult to say exactly where the difference lies,' he

went on, 'but you seem gentler, and more spiritual. Perhaps what expresses it best is our old word, more *otherworldly*.' I told him I often felt as if another manual had been added to the organ, one with richer, deeper stops, and to this day I think that is a good picture of what a new great emotion can do for you. 'Yes,' answered Harry, 'and all the music, including that played on the other manuals, benefits.'

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At last Levi was free to hear all I had written so far of *Fantasio*—and permit me here to remind readers who may have forgotten—and small blame to them!—of certain remarks I made on this subject in the opening chapter of this volume. It was to the effect, that throughout these memoirs, unless something comic or hair-raising occurred in connection with the inevitable incidents of a musician's career, these events will be recorded in barest telegraph style. Any other would not be tolerable either to writer or reader; besides which, if anything at all, this book is about life, not about music. Suffice it to say, then, that Levi urged me to enter the opera as soon as it was finished for an anonymous international competition that was to take place the following year. 'There may be some foreign genius competing of whom I haven't heard' (he said) 'but I fancy I know all that is doing in Central Europe, and I don't think you will have any dangerous rival!' Of course too I played the Mass to him and the chief Choral Conductor with the same results as at Amsterdam and Cologne. And though Levi himself had nothing to do with that department, he told me that beyond any shadow of doubt the Mass would be done at Munich that winter. (It appeared, too, that he wrote to our mutual friend Mary Fiedler: 'But for the Lisl tragedy she could never have written it.')

Arrived at Leipzig the first excitement was a meeting

with the Fiedlers, to whom so many pages of ' Impressions that Remained ' are devoted, and who during the summer lived in a delightful apartment arranged for them by her mother-in-law, old ' Madame ' Fiedler, *châtelaine* of *Schloss Crostewitz*. Here it was that I had spent so many happy week-ends in my youth—forcing her staid carriage-horses over the jumps on the Leipzig racecourse, driving them tandem along the lanes, and thereby shortening her life, so she assured me !

The charm of Mary's apartment was that it had been contrived in an angle of the big Farm Quadrangle hard by, from which, but on the far side, issued and returned, morning and evening, every sort of animal—a picturesque detail that did not appeal to Mary, who not only had ' nerves,' but being a rich, impulsive, extremely decorative, golden-haired young woman, pursued by all painters and adored by her husband, was rather spoiled. The Schloss was a typical big German country-house, built in the midst of woods beside a lake over which hung a huge terrace. In 1813, once the Napoleonic invasion of Saxony had begun, the then occupants hastily went off in the opposite direction, and five or six French cannon-balls were still sticking in the walls. When first I had seen them, being young and innocent, I imagined they stuck there of their own accord, and admired their tenacity. Later on it was a grievous disappointment to realise that year by year—I think on the anniversary of the battle, but won't swear to that—they were carefully loosened and re-embedded in nests of fresh mortar—a proceeding which was carried on in more than one adjacent Schloss.

It was delightful to hear that everything Levi had said to me—and more—about *Fantasio*, had been written by him to his friend Mary, who after Conrad's tragic death became his wife. (Conrad was slightly paralysed, and endeavouring to open the heavy outside shutters, over-balanced, crashed down two stories into the paved court,

and broke his neck.) Unfortunately a few beloved Leipzigers were taking waters, or settled for the summer in the Harz, Thuringia, and such places. Still there were plenty of old friends left to welcome my very attractive niece with open arms ;—rich, worldly, tennis-playing but deeply musical friends like the Limburgers (who had a lovely country-house not far from Crostewitz), and socially humble but musically supreme friends like the Röntgens, Frau von Holstein, and many others who had made my early Leipzig years so happy. The Wachs, who eventually became Kitty's closest friends, were still in Switzerland, alas ; but I played the Mass at Frau von Holstein's and again at the beloved Röntgen's.

On the latter occasion I suddenly saw the wraith of Archbishop Benson floating over the piano . . . but first I should say that few Germans can pronounce *th*, consequently my name generally came out '*Esel*,' which is German for *donkey*—a fact which gave extra point to a classic remark of Papa Röntgen's after the Kyrie. Accustomed, like His Grace, to stately Handelian methods of apostrophising the Deity (and it must be remembered that my rendering of Choral Music at the piano was a ceiling-cracking affair), he cried '*Aber liebe Esel ! so redet man den lieben Gott doch nicht an !*' ('But, dear donkey, one doesn't address the dear Lord in *that* fashion !')

A good deal of time was spent in searching for the right sort of family to harbour Kitty for the winter, and a first-rate expert to teach her German ; which ends accomplished, I decided—and Kitty's mother enthusiastically endorsed the idea—to give a party at our hotel to as many old friends as I could collect. After which I went straight back to England, feeling certain that Kitty's Parisian homesickness would not have a German sequel. Nor did it, for she and Leipzig suited each other to perfection. It was evidently in the family.

LETTER SECTION III

(JANUARY TO AUGUST 1893)

(A)

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MRS. BENSON AND E. S.

[Harry, who had a very charming recollection of his meeting with Mrs. Benson at Aix a year ago, had asked me whether I thought she would like him to run over from Nyon and pay his respects to her at Zermatt, where she was going. But she felt that for them to meet, seeing that our friendship persisted, was impossible.]

E. S. TO MRS. BENSON.

Frimhurst.
July 13, 1893.

. . . Harry asks me to tell you that he is 'sorrier than he can say' that the facts of the case prevent your seeing him.

He told me one day you were the most interesting person he had met for years, and the one he would most care to discuss and compare notes with.

I answered that you would get more out of him and really needed him more (which is true—do you know?) than anyone I had ever seen (this of course in my opinion; you might and probably would quite disagree). I sometimes take a fiendish delight, tempered, it is true, with honest and sorrowful regret, in reflecting on this fact ('the wages of virtue' ! !).

I have been seeing much of him, and even I myself never knew what a grand nature it is. He little knows it,

but his utter absence of egoism of any sort, his moderation and justice and unutterable sweetness of temperament do make me feel small sometimes. I think his all-comprehending affection is the greatest stimulus I have ever known. To be cared for by that man is a constant counsel of perfection. . . .

MRS. BENSON TO E. S.

Addington Park, Croydon.

August 7, 1893.

. . . Well Ethel, and how do things stand between us now? I scarcely know, but I am acutely conscious of one thing—the alteration in you since you have known Lady Ponsonby. It interests me most deeply. I am, and always have been very, very glad you have her—though like many other most pardonable pangs, I may be forgiven . . . yes, I even forgive myself, and with a smile . . . for feeling that I would rather have produced the alteration than come under its operation. If I could have come that day to Norman Tower we might have discussed it. . . .

E. S. TO MRS. BENSON.

Hotel Bellevue, Munich.

August 24, 1893.

. . . Well—why not go to the point at once—what you say about being changed since I have known Lady Ponsonby, or rather got to be friends with her. At first I was inclined to think it was merely the effect of ‘satisfaction.’ If one has seen a river only half full ever since you came there, and some day a barrier up the mountains breaks down, and the chief feeding source becomes available again, I expect the river would look very different. But from another witness I have corresponding testimony to yours. H. B. is here, and without my telling him that you had said anything he began about it yesterday. But he specified what the change consists in—which you don’t; I wish you had—and it is evidently more than that my sails are now filled with wind.

What you say about wishing to have effected, not only to witness, the change touches me deeply—I wish I could find language gentle enough to express the musings that your words gave birth to. It is the old story ; for certain things to happen you must be wanted (how often have I said this ?) as much as you want, and must feel that your entrance upon the scene is an equally great event to both. One cannot create wants in oneself, and one whose life is very full, like yours, in whom all the front seats are taken, *cannot* make fresh room by willing it.

You say you wonder if I give you credit for being disappointed at not being able to make it? Yes—indeed I do. I have often felt about you as one might of a friendly neighbouring continent that says to the island : ‘ I wish I had a real market for your goods ; come and get rid of as much as I can do with when you like—I only regret that your trade can’t base on me—or that your produce isn’t of a different order.’ There is no *good will* particularly between me and my recently acquired market. She wants my goods and I want hers. The only thing that sometimes strikes me bitterly is the thought, ‘ It might have been so seven years ago.’ Nothing is more perpetually before my eyes than the uncertainty of life. Well—it’s no good thinking about it.

I *do* appreciate your being glad for me—as well you may be—but it doesn’t surprise me. I don’t think I know any woman as unselfseeking as yourself—except Lady P. herself. . . .

(B)

*CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LADY PONSONBY
AND E. S.*

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

Frimhurst.

June 25, 1893.

. . . I was rather touched at the enthusiasm of Thornycroft and Gosse for H. B. At the party last night I was late, and when H. came in he knew not one soul there, not

even the host, and Gosse said he did it better than anyone he ever saw.

Harry is interesting to me among other reasons for this one ; anyone can see he is not of 'the world,' that his sword is not kept bright by constant use and subsequent polish. Consequently there is not the faintest *souppçon* of routine about his manner (I won't say manners ; it means less in the plural). He is as he is because he gravitates naturally to the real thing. I feel about his ways, which are not the ways of other people, what I do about his books ; they make other people's ways and books seem rather fussy. . . .

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

Frimhurst.

July 10, 1893.

. . . I have just had two sheets from dear Arthur Benson about Harry. . . . It is strange how appreciation of one you love rather fires your mood towards him who has appreciated. (I am a little in love with Arthur Benson since that letter and have written to Harry to say so.) He tells me his mother broods and broods over H.'s books. It is sad and strange that this should be so—that she, of all women, is forced by her clearness of vision, her incapability of resting on a truth after it has ceased quite to satisfy her, to commune with him in this silent way.

What a strange woman she is ! and how much nearer her I am now, when the world would judge us rather inimical, than when we were apparently greater friends ! Each knows that the other is preoccupied with the question of questions, and when we are together we fence humorously about anything and everything but that. . . . Yes indeed, I should much like to meet her at your house. . . .

[As will be gathered from the above, Mrs. Benson and I met occasionally, but the outcome was not very satisfactory. And when I wrote in 1895 suggesting a visit to Addington, Mrs. Benson practically 'gave me warning' ; said that neither Lucy Tait (Edith Davidson's sister who lived with them and to whom I was

much attached) nor Maggie, were now well disposed towards me . . . and as for the Head of the Church . . . well . . . 'needless to labour that topic' !

After that we occasionally came together, but to little purpose ; then came the Militant Campaign of which she strongly disapproved ; and I still more strongly, not to say violently, condemned the angle of the Church to the whole question, though its Head was then my beloved Archbishop Davidson !

As Arthur Benson had pointed out, the real difficulty between his mother and me was incompatibility between two different civilisations. None the less, many years later in the last year of her life, a short but warm and human relation sprang up between us—which rather amused us both ! Time had swept away many obstacles ; her husband was dead ; Harry was dead, and the question of Woman Suffrage had been swamped by the Great War. But that epoch is beyond the scope of the present volume.]

(C)

*CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN H. BREWSTER
AND E. S.*

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Langham Hotel.
January 13, 1893.

It has made my heart swell to see you again. Do you know that sensation. [*Here follows, for once, what he calls 'baby talk' of the worst description. E. S.*]

. . . After dinner I went to see Henry James. He was out. I walked all the way back ; sad and happy. Never mind the sadness. It is always about the perishable self and therefore does not exist ; it is an intra-uterine sort of thing.

The park was full of people ; such a hum of voices, and the sound of skates on the ice and lanterns gliding about. A lot of life. And floating above it all, very distinct to me (whence the happiness), the strange strength that belongs to no one in particular, but that makes all these figures

be and move, and chooses some, no one knows why, to fold them round with beauty—as I would like to fold you in my arms.

I don't know why I tell you all this ; there is neither head nor tail to it. Only there are depths stirring that don't give forth words. A pretty reason to begin talking, for a logician.

Well, I don't know how one is going to say ' God bless you ' in my Un-Common Prayer Book. But that is what I say, never mind how.

H.

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Champhaudry.

February 1, 1893.

. . . I am firmly resolved not to make myself miserable about you because I feel to the very tips of my fingers that the air we breathe together, with one pair of lungs, is of the mountain top or high plateau kind, belongs to the crisp golden regions above the fog. If you are playing me a mean feminine trick—which in my heart of hearts I don't believe—I mean the trick of despising me for the very obedience you exact, I shall simply let you do it. You would soon weary of its cheapness and stroll uphill to me in an unconcerned way. Are you astonished at so much fuss over so simple a thing as ' Please sit on the other side of the table ? ' If so, that only proves that you are not me, nor of the same sex to the best of my belief.

Unfortunately there are occasions when a great part of my conversational powers runs into my arms and hands, etc. ; and talking from the other side of the table reminds me vividly of the game where one has to answer questions without making use of the letter R, or some other specified letter. One smiles agreeably and answers with the strangest circumlocutions. No beautiful short cuts, dear to the concise mind. It takes an hour to pick one's way through an idea that could be most happily developed and illustrated before you had time to say, ' don't. ' Let us hope that practice makes perfect.

Say something nice to me. I want to be spoilt a little just now. Shall be as hard as a Spartan again soon.

Are you hunting and enjoying yourself at Selaby? Don't forget to send me the musical criticisms. Mary Hunter sent me the one in the *Musical News*, with which I was well pleased. As for the effort being apparent, what have they not said of Brahms and Wagner? Original work generally seems strained. The path to receive it is not yet worn in the brain and the listener exteriorises his own effort and credits it to the work. The mythological instinct. I am sure your Mass has its faults; so have you; but it is strong and sweet as yourself. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

February 6, 1893.

. . . I should not be human if I did not think Lady Ponsonby a most delightful woman after all you tell me. That is just what I want: the paganism and the self-control, the emancipation of thought and the strong sense of beauty. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

February 22, 1893.

. . . Take as much rope as you like but don't keep me in daily suspense for a month with nothing to feed my impatience on but the knowledge that you are ill; tell me simply that you are going to deposit me in the cloak room for a little while. I know well enough that you will not lose your check, and I am not like the horrid little children who want to be noticed all the time. But don't keep me dangling by the nape of the neck. . . .

I think you can leave me in the cloak room for more weeks at a stretch than I can leave you for hours. It goes with your proneness to new passions and grand discoveries of the right person—which is a beautiful gift with a touch of tipsiness in it. . . .

You speak too of a goal which you hope to have reached by the time you are—say fifty. When I hear of ‘the goal’ I always think of the fable of the farmer and the hidden gold he left to his three sons : they dug their field so well in search of it that it brought forth tenfold ; and that was the treasure. What might perhaps be claimed with truth is that there is in the race of life something equivalent to what boatmen call their second breath ; some dropping exhausted before they get it, and others safe to go on after the crisis with a steady pull to the end. The dread of interfering with this in you could make me get into a nutshell—with the silent conviction that when the nutshell was opened again I should grow up to the sky like the genius the fisherman lets out of a box in the Arabian Nights. . . .

I wonder how many different pictures one would have to paint of the same individual or of the same household, to do justice to the marvels of their stratification ? And they are all true. Perhaps our immediate, unanalysed, indescribable impression of a person sums them all up like a wonderful composite photograph, and as soon as we begin to seek the elements of which it is made we find images that it seems impossible to reconcile—broken columns and soaring larks, schoolboys, and death’s heads, and crusaders, and hands upraised for prayer, and legs upraised for dance—or anything.

The same with a household. You think you see it quite clearly ; then you look a little closer and you wonder if it is a plague-stricken city, or a hive of joyful bees, or a hot-house for rare plants. The other evening if you had looked into the drawing-room here you would have inclined to the hive conception. The two Guerrieri Gonzaga maidens had dined with us—their parents are out of town. The elder girl, Maria, is one of the loveliest creatures living and no one in Rome can hold a candle to her. At least that is my opinion and she knows it and does not object to it in the least. Her younger sister would shine as a pretty girl anywhere but by her side. Both very dark. Clotilde and her ‘tutor’ Miss Thompson very fair. The latter a nice little English face with no lines and a sweet

expression ; the former overflowing with health and spirits and taking the palm for low dress scenery. It was a joyful sparkling little team. Then the door opened and in came, unexpected, our neighbour and proprietress the Signora Contessa Cini followed by two of her faithful admirers ; one a Knight of Malta, de Brazza Savorgnan, brother of the explorer who is governor of the French Congo, the other a most picturesque old marchese who is chamberlain to the King. I caught a good glimpse of the whole scene a moment later ; the four girls chattering together, all talking and laughing at the same time, while the bewildered theologian hovered round them in a semi-hypnotic state of admiration, trying vainly to collect himself and fix his thoughts on Luther or Zwingli ; myself and the chamberlain side by side on a sofa, enthusiastically praising Cavour ; Julia and the passionate long-bearded, eagle-beaked Knight of Malta discussing the concept of justice across the rather bored Contessa who could not take her eyes off the young people, and on whose wistful face was written as plainly as possible : ‘ I was like that not so long ago.’ . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Selaby.

February 27, 1893.

. . . I don't blame you for calling the arrival of Lady Ponsonby on the scene ‘ One of your grand discoveries of the right person.’ But Harry you know one must search, and mistake, and find ‘ better,’ and ‘ better still ’ till ‘ the best ’ is found. *And this is the best.* I told her, and I tell you, I am like the old lady who said to the burglar under her bed, ‘ I've been looking for you all my life and at last I've found you ! ’

She's difficult to describe ; moody, sensitive, and (one feels it) as fatally steadfast as I am myself. Only in her case sceptical philosophy runs through everything and makes her doubt the evidence of her own senses ; she reads everything and believes in nothing save the ideal. A mixture of passionate impulse and passionate reticence ; ascetic, and a sybarite ; courageous, direct, and on occasion

as veiled as Isis. I should judge that in most respects her sensuous life is as strong as that of most women in their prime ; as my own for instance ; and added to all a dignity that would never leave her in the lurch—a taste that is infallible.

There now ! can you at all guess the fascination and impressiveness of the whole ‘*Erscheinung*’ and understand what it is to me to have made her fond of me ? . . . and I mustn’t forget what I care for most in a way . . . her relation to her family . . . the hold she has, as companion in daily life, in trouble, laughter, problems of statesmanship on her husband. . . and as supreme influence on her children. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

March 8, 1893.

. . . You say such warm endearing things to me that I wonder who is buying my shares to make the stock rise in that manner ; and it is not difficult to discover the ‘bull’ ; you point at him clearly enough. He is Lady Ponsonby. Of course I am very glad of her favourable opinion. But what rejoices me most therein is the effect it has on you. This is no skit. Loving the power of life in each other, it is quite natural that we should feel it with increased keenness when it makes itself manifest by its action on others. Though I could dispense with their opinion it is joy to me that your countrywomen should be proud of you. . . .

You make me smile when you say you think you care for me now more than you ever did before. It reminds me of the tea sold by a London firm. There are three qualities. A is Best. B is Best of all. C is Better than best of all. You buy and taste and find that it is all the same tea ; the difference is only in the wrappings. It is true that wrappings have their importance. There is one kind (preceded by considerable unwrapping) which I could never induce you to try, alas ! When I read about your new friend’s sentiment on the subject I twisted about the room like a rat that has swallowed poison—only it was exultation.

As for the 'tea' itself, the 'how much do you love me' account—dear, it is like in the Kingdom of Heaven : there is neither first nor last ; it is all equal. You wrote to me ages ago, in your second letter (epistolary opus 2, No. 1 being simply 'don't') you wrote : 'I feel I am in for a good run.' Well the hounds are still in full cry and the horse ready for all the fences you care to take it to. The sport may slacken at moments and quicken at others, but it is all the same hunt, the same sky, the same unsetting day.

I have ordered 'The Master Builder,' and wonder if I shall agree with what you quote as Henry James's remark—that it has 'the only unpardonable fault, obscurity.' Have you read 'Rosmersholm' ? It is the best I know of Ibsen's plays. The dialogue is always excellent with him, and the construction clever, and the theme often very interesting. What damps me is a sort of self-important look, the didactic tone in one whose ideas are rather under-cooked ; and joined to this an extraordinary juvenile ignorance every now and then of how grown-up people behave—at least out of Scandinavia. His personages are under the strongest realistic light, as visible and heavy as flesh ; and all of a sudden they speak or act like the dramatic personæ of a schoolboy's day dream. But I have not read 'The Master Builder.' And anyhow Ibsen is someone. I am glad he is there. Then again the Scandinavians must be something of an unknown species, to judge by 'The Heritage of the Kurts.' . . .

I walk through the post about three times a week and don't even have to ask now for letters. They know me well, and if there is anything they call me and hand it me with a smile. I always expect to hear them say : 'Well ! how is she ?' . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Frimhurst.

March 19, 1893.

. . . It is the tea with the most wrappers on that I should like to offer you . . . and you yourself should open the parcel ! . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

March 29, 1893.

. . . If for conversational purpose we allow that it would be 'tragic unreason' in your case to give in to our (mutual) natural instincts, I want you to understand that I feel 'tragic unreason' in privation. . . . Well, at least love me in some unreasonable way, if not in that one which seems most natural. But, also, please, very reasonably. How wearisome is the thought of passion (for more than twenty-five minutes) without all the rest—the activity, the general expansion . . . the fun. And how flat all this is without the passion, or some substitute for it. I should like to know what kind of substitute you are going to find for it as regards me, as soon as you have ideally lodged me once for all among the singers of the Sistina Chapel . . . side by side with Abelard. Explain that ! . . .

[I said it was not 'once for all,' but merely a question of waiting awhile.]

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

April 19, 1893.

. . . My ambition would be not to fold you round with my love, because I think you don't want to be folded up in anything ; you would complain of stuffiness in three weeks, or twenty minutes ; but to fasten it to your shoulder with your arms free, like the lion's skin Hercules wears, with so firm a clasp you would never be able to slip it off ; and so gentle a one that you would never wish to. Also that the lion's skin itself should be so beautiful and rare a one that you would be proud of it. A great deal of ambition as you see. . . .

My trip to Naples has not put me out in the least. It was a splendid rush through sunlight to Sorrento and Amalfi and Pæstum. Pæstum hurts ; it is the only place I know that could almost move one to tears. A desolate fever-haunted plain with wild shaggy bullocks roaming

about in the brush ; then lovely mountains ; on the other side the sea—asleep, naked ; and near the shore the temple of Neptune, the oldest thing in the world—impressionally at least ; older than Greece or Assyria, as old as the oldest Egypt ; so solemn and serene and sweet that one burns with shame ; what have I done with my life ? It hurts and consoles at once. I reached Amalfi after nightfall by boat ; four men rowing ; after having driven at full speed for five hours along the cliffs ; very much the Turbie style of road. And my room was in an old monastery and opened on a star-lit cloister. And beneath my windows the sea. The air and sunlight had made me feverish ; I sat smoking in the cloister part of the night, and was someone whom you would have liked—a lot of phantasy and gloom and joy and strength and nonsense scrambling after each other and making a rattling fugue. At all events I had the impression that you did like me, and that the little cloister with the well in the middle of its garden heard many beautiful and a few strange things, all of them entwining. . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Frimhurst.

April 23, 1893.

. . . As for Mary's diagnosis of her two girls' characters, don't laugh, but I don't agree with it. Mary's rather given to fitting general principles to special cases, and that's a trick that always provokes me. It's like a tailor who should trust to his 'cut' and disdain taking measurements. He won't get the Gold Medal above, whatever he may do at the Chicago Exhibition. . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Frimhurst.

Easter Monday.

. . . Do get to know a certain Countess Feodora Gleichen who I believe would like to meet you. She's a great friend of Maggie Ponsonby's, extraordinarily talented, and sculpting in Rome against the wish of her parents who

are sort of cousins of the Queen *via* the Duchess of Kent's first husband. It is most amusing ; Countess Feo's Mama is the usual type of proper society woman, and these three daughters of hers are emancipated, lion-hearted, art-loving, society-despising girls with wills of iron. The second is studying music at Berlin, and the third, upon whom her mother's hopes were centred as 'dear good girl' likely to stay at home quietly, has great talent for painting, and already (at sixteen) is kicking over the traces ! A curious result of the marriage of an artistic German prince (for their father was a sculptor, handicapped of course by the royal connection) to a rather extra-conventional English-woman ! . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

May 1, 1893.

. . . Certainly you will understand every line of my 'Statuette' at first glance. If you are, as you say, only half grown, you are a promising child. I hope you will let me sit on your knee some day when you are too big to sit on mine. But linger yet awhile in short frocks, please. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

May 27, 1893.

. . . The visits I make amuse me ; I stare at people like a photographic machine and take their negatives home with me. Sometimes there is in the air the rustling of the wings of an invisible friendship that will never 'materialise,' as the mediums say, because civilisation is funny and one cannot say (as would be natural) to an accomplished and virtuous lady : 'You have rather an interesting face and you have actually made one or two remarks as of a creature that thinks ; let your husband and children and friends and duties slide for a fortnight and let us take a return ticket to New York ; we shall have time on the steamer to find out who we are.' But

even the rustling of invisible wings is now and then amusing. It stirs the tea round. Then other visitors come in ; and quick, the photographic apparatus goes up, and my head disappears under the black cloth. What complicates my relations with my fellow creatures is that I am obliged to conceal my metaphysical horns, which frighten or bore them, so that I come before them with the enigmatic appearance of an idle man who does not care for amusements. They have never seen such a specimen ; nor have I. And we look at each other with surprise. But the visits amuse me. . . .

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Frimhurst.

June 24, 1893.

. . . I was so proud of you the other night. I always am but I haven't often the chance of seeing you in company of others and noting how you stand head and shoulders above them all, and how everyone I care for—*my* friends—feel this before you have been two minutes in the room. . . . I have too bad a headache to write, but I love you with all my heart and soul. . . .

E.

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Grosvenor Hotel, London.

June 29, 1893.

. . . I don't know what it is the effect of, but I have an impression that keeps me company everywhere ; that of having been your friend since you were eight years old. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Heiden.¹

July 18, 1893.

. . . At present I can only think of you pictorially ; I have you with me on the retina and my thoughts are floating about in all directions like clouds in a foolish sky.

¹ Where the Herzogenbergs built a chalet, near Lake Constance.

It is partly the effect of Heiden. It is cold and windy and wet. I have a room at the hotel ; that is one consolation. The others are at Herzogenberg's where one forgathers aimlessly and talks German talk in German, I among them—I know not why unless it be the cruel fatality that makes me hate to wound people's feelings. There is Herzogenberg himself, ceaselessly lecturing, cheerfully and unctuously didactic. There is Helene Hauptmann. Have you ever heard of her ? She is the daughter of the musician or musical theoretician. Age anything past forty ; and a dwarf ; a gnome. She and H. live together, summer and winter ; even as *Naturkinder*. Their becrippledness and their ugliness prevent the public's eyebrows from going up. They play together 'vier-handig' ¹ H.'s variations and adagios. I smoke and say 'sehr schön.' ² There is Spitta's daughter. Spitta is a man who writes about Bach. She is twenty-seven and nice looking ; coughs and drinks milk. The children look at the *Fliegende Blätter*. And the wind howls. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

July 20, 1893.

. . . I have also read Mrs. Meynell's 'Rhythm of Life.' The first essay which gives its name to the volume is remarkable. It is a pleasure to read a few pages of such chastened prose. And I much like the portrait called 'Remembrance,' though I should not have liked the gentleman—doubtless *Gilbert Osmond* whom you declare I resemble. What an insult ! But I wearied very quickly of the little volume. She reminds me of a dancing mistress talking of deportment. She turns her toes out to speak about style. Good style and good manners are unconscious. Otherwise they are fine airs and 'gens de lettrerie.' I have come to the conclusion that Alice wears blue stockings up to her arms. The first and immediate effect of which is that I should not care to see. . . .

¹ Duets.

² Beautiful !

CHAPTER XV

(SUMMER 1893)

THE arrival at Frimhurst of myself and Vernon, whom I had met as by a miracle at Waterloo on the day of my return from Germany, was in the true Smyth Family Robinson tradition. This visit had been carefully timed to take place during my father's absence, for I did not think he and Vernon would hit it off; and though the servants were all there, every sort of message announcing our arrival had gone astray. However there were five cutlets and a brace of grouse in the larder, the latter providentially sent by Lady Ponsonby's nephew, Mr. Frank Mildmay.

I immensely enjoyed our two days together though increasingly conscious that we were not animals of the same breed and belonged in different cages, the main difficulty being that if ever anyone was of the *genus* professor it was Vernon. An Italian friend of hers had told me she was only pleasant with '*non-performers*,' that people who set forth to do something definite in the way of art or literature caused her hackles to rise. I think this was generally true, but not always. In the case of Mary Robinson love had been more powerful than the strongest glue to keep those hackles down, and for myself I can only say that she was if anything too appreciative, telling me more than once that I was the only woman she had ever met who, etc., etc. 'I believe in you,' she wrote after that visit. 'I wish I believed in myself half as much.' And it is a fact that though convinced that no one but herself knew anything about

literature, to my mind she undervalued herself as writer. By the same token where she admired she was supremely generous. True, if such a one bore away the conversational palm when she herself had intended to shine (which was always the case when there was a gallery) she could not help trying to score off her rival, but once the door was between them she would pay a noble tribute innocent of the faintest flavour of acidity.

Speaking for myself, another thing that prevented our alliance from becoming human and intimate was her lack of charm ; not only of physical charm, which I confess has always seemed to me of great importance, but brilliant and intensely amusing as she was, in my opinion her intellect had the same defect. Mrs. Benson and I certainly did not belong in the same cage, but so fascinating was her mind that I could have groped about in it for ever. And so full of surprises was it, that only the other day, reading a letter from her son Arthur, I came across a phrase I had forgotten and which made me jump. 'If you love anyone too much,' she had once said to her son, 'it is no good trying to pull back. You must go on and come out the other side, trusting to life to restore the balance.' Even in her grave, then, that woman can surprise me ! But I always felt that as often as not Vernon made up her views as she went along instead of their being the inevitable result of her mental configuration, which to me is the necessary condition of an interesting mental landscape.

A good instance of her inability to trade successfully with her really remarkable natural resources was our visit to Farnborough Hill. I had been a little dubious as to the outcome, because, like so many other people, Vernon had always been persuaded that the Empress's nature was essentially frivolous. But to my surprise and delight, once in the presence her prejudices slipped off her shoulders like a silken cloak, and in one short hour she mastered the quality of that curious intelligence, which, together with

the nobility of her spirit, will astonish those who read the book referred to above, 'Lettres Familiales de l'Impératrice Eugénie,' and above all an exquisite memoir recently published by Lucien Daudet, 'A l'Ombre de l'Impératrice Eugénie.' I found recently a letter of mine quoting some of Vernon's remarks; telling how struck she had been with the grace of our hostess's conversation that afternoon—a grace born of exquisite instinct perfected by *métier* which resulted in a conversational charm I have never seen equalled. There were some French people present and some Spaniards, in fact the elements were rather clashing; and Vernon noted with how slight a touch on the wheel our hostess steered the conversation into safe waters, the face, the inflection of the voice, even a certain little inclination of the head so familiar to us who knew her well contributing to the effect. And Vernon instantly grasped why I had said that the extreme *originality* of the Empress's mind lay more in a novel and peculiar grouping of ideas than in the ideas themselves—'which' added Vernon, 'belongs to artistic inspiration.' In fact she left Farnborough Hill quite bemused by its *châtelaine*.

Alas! the sympathy was not reciprocal. Like Queen Victoria the Empress hated having speeches made at her, and whereas the critical Madame le Breton remarked 'En voilà une qui a de l'esprit,' Vernon's oracular ways and the impossibility of getting a straight answer to a straight question out of her irritated the Empress, though from her manner you never would have guessed it. As for my assurance that in some respects Vernon was very humble, she simply wouldn't believe it!

Yet it was true. Plain women have often exercised an irresistible attraction, but Vernon was not among them, and I think she knew it. Devoted friends she had in plenty—I have known not a few of them—but it was the apple on the topmost bough she had in mind when, one day, in that curious high-pitched voice of hers, to imitate

which was Maggie Ponsonby's masterpiece of mimicry, she put a certain question to me: 'To how many people,' she asked, 'have you given without reserve and got something like the equivalent in return?' She knew all about Lisl, and a good deal about H. B., and when I answered 'To three,' I think she guessed who the third was, because presently, after again asseverating that she 'didn't care a hang' for admiration but only for affection, she rather wrung my heart by saying that she was certain that in that way she had nothing to look for from Lady Ponsonby. 'I have no *charm* for her,' she sighed, 'and she will always condemn me to pine on a perch'—coining, half in fun, half in bitterness of spirit, one of those inimitable phrases with which her conversation was studded.

Wherever Vernon passed, echoes of her verbal quips would long possess the air, to be eventually dispersed alas! by the wind that bloweth as it listeth and lacks selective genius. But I can recall one amazing portmanteau effort of hers, addressed to the clerical organiser of a local flower show to which I had dragged her. He was, as I had informed her, a scholar and in every respect worthy of her steel, and, strolling up by chance at the fag end of what had evidently been an exhaustive discussion, this is what I heard Vernon saying: 'In short, dear Mr. C——, woman's love is so essentially *maternal* that it were tedious to enumerate possible deviations from this basic character; whereas man's love, as obviously and invariably, is *triune*; that is acquisitive, possessive, and BESTIAL.' No listener (and there were plenty, for Vernon's fame had preceded her) will ever forget how the last word, delivered with triple emphasis in the penetrating high-pitched voice I spoke of, rang out on that rectory lawn among the flower-pots and turnips.

But it was when she was not preaching that these jewels of speech were lavished most profusely, and I was often able, by a sudden attack of the nature of throwing a wet

sponge in somebody's face, to hustle her out of the pulpit. She would stop short, wink and blink, wipe away the drops of water as it were, and then would follow such a dazzling display of fireworks that I never regretted the brutality of my technique. This may partly account for the following trope of hers, handed to Maurice Baring whom she loved and who was one of her most fervent admirers.

She had been assisting at some musical enterprise of mine—an opera or a concert—and was good enough to advance a claim to fellowship with me, as female labourer on the field of art. 'In fact,' she said, 'our association might be pictorially, nay, symbolically represented by the Lion and the Unicorn, dear Ethel being the fierce roaring lion, and I the feeble unicorn, occasionally hazarding an ineffectual prod.'

Meanwhile her prods left nothing to be desired in the way of vigour. She could be gloriously rude, and during that very visit to Frimhurst, after telling me I was the only woman, etc., she remarked that no one would believe how little she minded being stupid, rude, or disappointing 'with the crowd of indifferents like yourself, whose impressions of me are of no consequence at all.' But in the case of those she loved, or to whom she felt personally drawn, 'like Lady Ponsonby,' she would cut herself in pieces to be pleasant. Rather nettled, I said I was glad she didn't stand on her hind legs for my benefit, since in my experience when people believed they were at their best, it was often an illusion. My friends maintained this was my own case, and I had frequently noticed it in others.

Vernon looked thoughtful; I think she took it in. And this time I did feel rather remorseful. It is human nature if you are hit to hit back again, but ninety-nine times out of a hundred you wish you hadn't. Besides which I knew exactly what she meant—that the only opinion which counted for her was that of people she was fond of; a sentiment which had my entire sympathy.

Between her and H. B. relations were apt to become strained. Each had genuine respect for the brain power and mental integrity of the other, but if his root and branch repudiation of dogmatism in any and every form secretly drove her to frenzy, no amount of cleverness or sterling worth or anything else made up to him for arrogance and bad manners; indeed one of my perennial grievances against him was his consequent detestation of Doctor Johnson.

At a certain luncheon party there was a memorable round between him and Vernon, following an apparently innocent remark of his, not even addressed to her, to the effect that what he admired in Shakespeare was *le fond*, rather than *la forme*. 'Pray are you not aware, Mr. Brewster,' asked Vernon, 'that what you have just said is consummate nonsense?' 'And what,' said Harry in his smoothest manner, 'what, *besides being extremely rude*, is the drift of that remark?' 'The drift,' replied the dauntless Vernon with added scathingness, 'is that surely every intelligent person is aware that *le fond* and *la forme* are *co-sub-stantiate*?' The enunciation of the last word was so indescribably funny that two or three of us began to laugh, and fortunately laughter lays the dust of many a pitched battle.

Sometimes her reactions to particularly well-meant gestures were equally comic. For instance I once endeavoured to express in a letter my unbounded admiration for one of the most perfect, also the most insidiously terrifying things she ever wrote, called 'Dionysius in the Euganean Hills,' and in acknowledging this epistle she remarked, 'When you appreciate a thing best—and you are a great appreciator, dear Ethel—you rather hug the life out of it, and hold it up, an inanimate rag doll rather than a solidly carved idol, in your triumphant arms.' She went on to say this was probably part of the performer's temperament which is in every musician and perhaps every dramatist

(‘and you, Ethel, are both!’), for she had noticed the same peculiarity in Bernard Shaw.

I believe she made up this theory on the spot, but how brilliant it is—how wittily formulated, and, as acknowledgment of an irrepressible outburst of admiration, how killingly Vernon-esque !

While in the act of writing this wholly inadequate sketch of a remarkable woman, a little volume has come into my hand that shows what response it was in Vernon to make, when a friend’s appreciation was combined with sincere affection, both given and taken ; namely, a collection of letters to Maurice Baring, not very numerous but covering thirty years. And through them all runs a touching refrain : ‘Keep a little affection for me, dear Maurice ; I value it so much from you !’

In these startlingly human documents, the brilliancy of which goes without saying, you get a Vernon no longer inventing opinions on the spur of the moment—perverse, ingenious, amusing by turns—but a friend and colleague whose flow of sustained criticism, severe sometimes but more often unreservedly appreciative, follows the natural trend of the writer’s brain.

These letters made me wish for a moment that she had occupied herself regularly with literary criticism, but on second thoughts I see it would not have worked. Her literary taste was, I think, not catholic enough—too prejudiced, too capricious. With other writers she was ever prone, as the Empress Eugénie put it, to ‘pick up a quarrel,’ whereas when the beauty of the Campagna, of the Auvergne, of the Sussex Downs flooded her soul, the fault-finding demon got swept overboard.

There was much in Vernon’s intellectual make-up, as in Harry Brewster’s, that was French, and these two otherwise divergent spirits were one in admiration for the work of Baring—an English writer, who, as a literary Frenchman told me the other day (and I have felt the

same thing in reading French reviews) is better *perceived* on the other side of the Channel than here, whether as to the drift or the subtlety of his art. Vernon had strange illuminating things to say about him. In one place she speaks of his 'little, dry, bony style, which looks as if it were not one at all,' adding 'what a blessing after so much lusciousness—sleepy pears with wasps hidden in them!' in another of his 'strange musical rather than literary talent'—his 'queer slight people—slight and musical like a melody, and like a melody going to one's heart.'

But all her comments are not complimentary; there are delicious Vernon-esque gibes about the 'footling uselessness and devouring passion' of many of Baring's characters, 'and,' she adds, 'they have time for it, as they never do anything but go to parties!' Yet I fancy she would have allowed, if driven into a corner, that one point of such books is perhaps to show that people who go to parties can also go to pieces on the rocks of love quite as agonisingly and convincingly, though perhaps not as decoratively, as Tristan, Guinevere and other Great Chartered Lovers.

There are very funny passages, too, in the letters—for instance where, referring to one of his Russian novels, she says that the 'everlasting theology' in his books bores her, and asks if it is a vow . . . 'so much theology for every glass of vodka!'—but she allows, in a parenthesis, that perhaps that element makes the books 'go to one's heart' (a favourite phrase of hers). Or again, where she tells of her house being turned into a sort of *Chapelle Ardente* by a profusion of flowery offerings—some from people who had never left so much as a card on her—a report having got about that it was her eightieth birthday; 'whereas I am only seventy-eight, which surely is ever so much less!'

Finally, if it be not presumptuous, I should like to

offer one more bouquet to Vernon the critic of books, inasmuch as unlike my enemy the musical pundit who thinks lightly of Gilbert and Sullivan because they make us laugh, this is how she writes about 'Dead Letters,' 'Lost Diaries,' 'Diminutive Dramas,' and other so-called 'minor' works of her correspondent. 'You know my admiration for these wonderful little things of yours and how my ambition has always been *to do something like them.*' And I who thought Vernon a bit of a pedant ! . . . In fact, if, as one who has no pretensions to literary criticism, I am venturing to make profit out of this rare chance of reading her letters to a great mutual friend, it is because I think they throw an interesting light on the psychology of the writer.

Fortunately for me I saw a good deal of Vernon in after life, and though time did not sensibly alter my earlier impressions, few things have ever given me deeper pleasure and honoured me more profoundly than her dedication to me of what I consider the most beautiful item in her whole output, the play *Ariadne in Mantua*.

About that dedication, which runs '*To Ethel Smyth, thanking, and begging her for music,*' I had an attack of stupidity and thought Vernon was merely giving vent to her always generous estimate of me as musician (she really loved and *felt* music), never dreaming that this was an invitation to write incidental music to *Ariadne* ! But a year or two before her death, when it was acted in Italian in the wonderful garden of a Florentine friend of hers, she herself following the printed text line by line, for alas ! by then she was stone deaf, someone tricked it out with old Italian music, which I should have suggested at the time, had I understood her meaning, as the only right thing to do.

Concerning her writing, an admirer of hers who was a judge, H. B., complained that much of it lacks 'the stamp of definiteness.' Indeed, even as non-expert I can

see it is very unequal. But surely, at their best, the essays are among the most perfect things in the language?

I remember how their perfection pierced my spirit one day during the war. Infuriated by the line she had taken when lecturing in America, I had refused to meet her in England. But that day—it was in 1917—on holiday from my radiographic work at the Vichy Military Hospital, lying on the top of Mont Sancy, my head in blazing sunshine, my feet in a patch of snow, and the Tauchnitz edition of Vernon's 'Hortus Vitae' in my hand, it seemed to me that nothing really matters except beauty. 'Once back in Mont d'Or,' I said to myself, 'I *must* write and thank her for the beauty that lives in this book!' (But I didn't—not till 1919 when the war was over!)

In her nature was undoubtedly something warped and stunted which, as time went on, her deafness aggravated. Latterly, owing in part to the fatigue of listening, she refused to see any but one or two of her most intimate cronies; even Maurice Baring could not persuade her to receive him. Worst of all, after her death which occurred in 1935, one learned that a perverse clause in her will blocks the way of a biography. But it is impossible to prevent people from writing a memoir, and I cannot help hoping that this will be done by the person best qualified for the task.

There is never a large public waiting open-mouthed for work of the character of Vernon's, but once her output has been weeded and edited, fame will surely come to her in a measure denied her during her lifetime. This exquisite Toledo blade was never fashioned to rust its heart out in a ditch.

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While I had been sketchily entertaining Vernon at Frimhurst, my father had been on a visit I like to think of now. Hugh Eastwood's regiment, the King's Dragoon Guards, had lately been transferred to Norwich, and the

Eastwoods had taken Sprowston Grange, dower house of Rackheath, which is the home of my mother's people the Straceys. In the 'forties Grandpapa Smyth, who had begun life as a soldier, was Director of the Norwich Branch of the Bank of England, and it was at Sprowston that my father, then a young man home on leave from India, first set eyes on my mother. And now he found himself revisiting with delight the scenes of his youth and eagerly introducing Nelly and Hugh into houses that used to welcome him fifty years ago. Many old men would fall into sentimentality under such circumstances, but one of my father's characteristics was the whole-hearted way he lived in the present. Yesterday was faithfully, though as a rule silently, cherished in his heart, but he never let it cast a shade over to-day.

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Almost immediately after his return an event happened which delighted him and sent Bob's shares rocketing. He had been acting on some manoeuvres as extra A.D.C. and galloper to our connection, General Edward Chapman, and though far the youngest of the staff officers had done so well that Sir Evelyn Wood remarked before a lot of big-wigs : ' I've had my eye on Bob Smyth for many years, and cannot think of anyone who would make a better A.D.C.' This incident was reported to Papa by General Chapman, who added : ' I love the boy,' and who, when he got the Edinburgh command, appointed Bob his aide-de-camp.

He was and is a queer fellow, this only brother of mine, whose character and turn of mind are a continual delight to me. A born cavalry soldier, doggedly persistent, a quick-moving intelligence burnished by keenest sense of humour, there was not by nature one drop of diplomatic blood in his veins. If his General issued and was proud of a bad map, Bob, who had a scout's eye, would never hesitate to say, ' Well, I don't think much of it ! ' This

quality, for which one loved him, seemed likely to stand in his way later on ; and so it did for a time.

Where his queerness came in is, that in spite of this tendency to unwise candour he was peculiarly considerate of other people's feelings, and unless driven to it never came down with a crash on their toes, as did, occasionally, his sister Ethel. In fact for the present writer to draw attention to neglect of the arts of diplomacy is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. Many years later I got to like the painter Sargent less than formerly, because he was for ever saying to Mary Hunter : 'Do persuade your sister to *pretend* she likes Elgar's music, for when she says she doesn't people think it's jealousy.' But as I have often reflected, it takes some of us a lifetime to learn that 'toute vérité n'est pas bonne à dire.'

Meanwhile this turn in the affairs of the Prodigal Son, tending to prove that anyhow as soldier no fault was to be found with him, immensely cheered my father. He now seemed quite reconciled to the idea of turning out of Frimhurst in November, and it was in a spirit of chastened joyfulness—for episcopal week-ends are solemn things—that after repairing the ravages caused in my wardrobe by Universal Aunt-dom, I went off with him to pay a state visit to Farnham Castle, the residence of the Bishop of Winchester. I remember spending part of Sunday afternoon on the top of the Keep with Canon Wilberforce, son of the celebrated Bishop Samuel Wilberforce who had reigned here some decades ago. In our mouths were cigarettes, at our feet the roof and glorious park of the Castle, and the subject under discussion was the attitude of the Church towards Sex and kindred matters. This sounds like a scene in a fourth-rate play, stuck in to flatter the prejudices of non-conformists and atheists, but it was nothing of the sort really . . . and I may add that the Canon was a married man. At times one seemed to catch

a glimpse of a shadowy but sturdy figure in long-skirted coat and gaiters moving stately among the flower-beds ; but if Bishop Sam's wraith had remonstrated I hope I should have replied that no amount of prelates and their wraiths can deny that times change. Likewise conversations. All the same I was glad that my father's gout rendered his sudden appearance on the Keep improbable. Had he caught me and the Canon smoking up there on a Sunday afternoon, I fancy the familiar snarl would have marred that genial countenance, even if he had not known what we were talking about. And, on occasion, no one could cast a more devastating blight than he.

During that summer—a period of intensive work and boiling heat—came rather an upsetting letter from Harry. It appeared that when he and I had been together at Munich, the Hildebrand children had caught sight of us and had reported the fact to Clotilde ; that Frau Hildebrand now laughed at herself for the attack of jealousy in which she had smashed her husband's bust of me ; and that they were brimming over with love for both of us, having apparently forgotten their responsibility for half the trouble. I seem now to have asked Harry if he were prepared for the facts of our association coming to Julia's ears, and whether it would not be better to tell her we met occasionally, though merely as friends ? And let me here remark that there had been nothing resembling love-making—in the law courts engagingly described as ' familiarities '—except during that fatal winter of '84-5, when he twice turned up at Leipzig, convinced that Julia was coming round, and when we were as good—or as bad—as an engaged couple.

To this suggestion Harry replied : ' Of course I have contemplated the possibility as one does that of slipping from the Matterhorn, but I don't know if that constitutes a preparation. You risk it, but if it happens it is a catastrophe all the same. Julia has not the mental equilibrium

necessary to stand the blow. I have the feeling that I must protect her from solitude of the worst kind, and have not the abnegation or the strength to sacrifice my life entirely to this task. I should fall into the same solitude myself. Therefore I stake upon my skill—also partly upon chance. A gambler's life ! . . . So much the worse if he breaks his neck.'

Being interpreted this meant, that if he told her about our occasional meetings, implacable, heroically uncompromising as she was (for she loved him all this time), Julia might say, 'Very well ; but if this goes on I refuse to see you again.' And he felt he could not take the responsibility of condemning her to an isolation that might well have ended, as he hints, in something like a mental overthrow. True, his only crime against her had been faithfulness to the ethical scheme on which their union had based, but the fact remained that when the test came she repudiated that scheme, and wished him to live on with her for ever in the bleak world of metaphysical abstractions they inhabited, when, eleven years ago, I had appeared upon the Florentine scene. This death in life he could not face. And since, for her, reality was the head of Medusa, could he bring himself to hold it up before her, force her to face it, and watch her turn into stone ? No ! I knew Julia, and knew it was as he said. Well then '*à bon entendeur salut !*' Evidently there was nothing for it but to go on as we were and trust to luck.

In my opinion, however, Julia was not a diplomatist's daughter for nothing. After Lisl's death she had been coldly warned by me that I should henceforth take my own path in life regardless of her existence on the same planet, and I believe she knew more than Harry suspected. Anyhow to the day of her death there was never any allusion between them to the subject.

CHAPTER XVI

(AUTUMN 1893)

It had always been (and still is) a theory of mine that to spend some time together under the same roof is essential, if the foundation of a new friendship is to be well and truly laid. And now it suddenly became possible for Lady Ponsonby to invite me to join them at the end of September at Abergeldie—a small farmhouse near Balmoral bought by the Queen. [Birkhall had again this year been lent to the Empress Eugénie, with whom I knew Rosario Alba would be staying.]

Those ten days were more perfect than any dream that was ever dreamed, partly because my hostess had at last come to believe it was not a case, as one of the Princesses who did not like me had suggested, of ‘one of Ethel Smyth’s usual crazes.’ O the golden time, the long quiet drives across the moors, the silent absorption of beauty—a silence broken one day by her suddenly saying ‘It is a beautiful world’; and in her voice was the soul of that Schubert song that for me was the soul of all who know how to grow old. As a rule Maggie, whom I otherwise delighted in, was not too amiable towards me, being, as I said, rather jealous, and above all provoked at that particular Princess speaking of her mother as being ‘under the dominion of Ethel Smyth.’ (Good Heavens: Lady Ponsonby under anyone’s dominion!) But during that whole visit she was her most delightful self, and it seems to me that no one can ever have laughed as much as we did at every meal.

I had the honour of seeing the Queen two or three times, and listening to a violinist, apparently staying there, whose technique was fairly good, whose soul was a shallow puddle of sentimentality, and who, accompanied by Princess Beatrice, gave many displays of his art at the Castle. Even Rosario, who knew still less about music (if that were possible) than her aunt, said one day, 'Doesn't he *slide about* on his violin a good deal?'

One couple who were then at Balmoral, the Grand Duke Serge and his wife, sister of the Czarina, made an indelible impression on me, and I expect on all who came in contact with them. He was one of the most attractive looking men I ever saw (the beauty of the Romanoffs was proverbial) tall, fair-bearded, a *tournure* of extreme distinction, and an irresistible charm of manner that did havoc among the ladies of the Court; in fact nature seemed to have fashioned in him a 'Portrait of a Russian Grand Seigneur' intended to put Titian's famous 'Portrait of an Italian Nobleman' in the shade. The Grand Duchess was physically as exquisite and almost as tall as her husband; but about her type of beauty, about the whole personality (this is not a case of remembering her terrible fate and constructing backwards) there was something that for some subtle reason rent your heart. A saint, and as universally adored in Russia as the Grand Duke was execrated, none could have foreseen for her what many thought would certainly be his fate—death by assassination. But there is seldom smoke without fire, and a reputation for cruelty, which went well with his cold blue eyes, would probably have been borne out by the experience of his wife, said to be his wife in name only. According to Russian belief Serge's tastes ran to every form of sexual aberration, 'except,' as Lawrence of Arabia might have put it, intercourse with a woman!

He was Governor of Moscow and I had not then read a book called 'The New Exodus' in which his vices were

hinted at and his political ruthlessness laid bare without reserve, including what in the poor, benighted old nineteenth century was considered a speciality of 'barbarous Russia'—merciless persecution of the Jews. I knew nothing about this mania, and when with a twinkle in his eye he asked me what I thought of 'our Jewish friend,' meaning the violinist Wolff, I afterwards regretted having given an answer that flattered his prejudices, though of course aimed solely at the musician's art, not at his race.

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It is not everyone who openly claims to deserve the honour of a public monument, but this claim is confidently put forward by the writer, and anyone who reads the following tale will, I think, allow it is not without justification.

A perennial subject of lamentation and grumbling among the junior members of the Royal Household was the total dearth of resources at Balmoral, miles away as it is from anywhere. Lawn tennis, which had dominated the youth of the 'eighties, was now for some mysterious reason under a cloud. And though an exceptionally brilliant performer among the aides-de-camp and equerries might occasionally be invited to take out a gun, as a rule there was nothing for it but to hang about all day kicking their heels, as did the powdered lackeys in the early decades of the century (and indeed later) in the anterooms and corridors of the Great. That this was rather hard lines on her gentlemen would never have occurred, of course, to the Queen; and though, according to report, that kindest most human of men the Prince of Wales had more than once expressed sympathy with their sad plight, he would have seen his way as little as anyone else to take steps about it—so tremendous was the awe inspired by his mother.

Well, one day, not wholly prompted by unselfish motives, a brilliant idea came to me. I knew that from the Queen downwards the whole Royal Family had fallen in love with

Rosario Alba, in fact it was said that except perhaps Carmen Sylva no woman had ever been such a success at our Court. She had been invited to go out deer-stalking by Prince Henry of Battenberg, was known to be an adept at all other forms of sport, and to play all games with skill and passion ; so one day I asked Sir Henry Ponsonby if he thought it possible to get permission, by way of a delicate compliment to the Duchess, to rig up a little nine-hole golf-course in the policies? He thought it a capital scheme and permission from on high was readily given ; next day a couple of gardeners and I set to work, and presently Sir Henry came striding along, nine jam-pots stowed away under his Inverness cape. Of course we had to utilise such natural hazards as the ground provided, and lofting a ball neatly over a sort of rocky hump, I remarked that that would do very well for one of the short holes. 'Better choose some other place,' said Sir Henry ; and when I learned that a certain medallion had been let into a large boulder on the far side of the hump, and realised what sacrilege I had unwittingly committed, to borrow Lady Hilda B.'s expression my spine opened and shut with dismay.

I was never again in those parts, but was assured that several members of the Household were in the habit of rising up and calling me blessed, as well they might. Later on the course was extended and improved out of all knowledge, and golf is now part of the Balmoral curriculum. But I have not yet heard of a medallion being let into some less imposing boulder at the back of some more humble hump, to commemorate what was a far more epoch-making event than people who have never set foot in the Victorian Court would suppose.

It evidently takes a woman to perform certain Joan of Arc-like feats. Listen to what Mr. Bernard Darwin tells us about the introduction of golf into the United States.

The game appears to have been first played in New England on the estate of a certain Mr. Hunnewell, one of whose guests, '*a young lady*,' had brought over a set of clubs from Pau and proceeded to demonstrate their use. Some of her pupils having pointed out to the Committee of the County Club that the cost of an experimental links 'need not go beyond fifty dollars,' a six-hole golf-course was laid out, and in April 1893, just five months before my Balmoral venture, an exhibition game was played '*by three gents*.'

Coming across this exciting passage in '*Playing the Like*,' I could not help regretting that the enterprising young lady, whose name apparently was not recorded—so like life!—had not partnered one of the three gents and made a foursome of it. To wonder if any sort of monument commemorates her feat would be waste of time, but anyhow the Prince of Writers on Golf has done his best for her. And had he known about the Balmoral incident, I am sure the English *pendant* of that New England heroine would not have been reduced to making suggestions for her own obituary notice.

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During that fortnight an end more important to me than making unrecorded history in the Balmoral policies, and which I had often despaired of reaching, was attained, namely, the beginning of a true perception on Lady Ponsonby's part of the personality of the Empress Eugénie. At Mentone two years ago my remarks on that subject had been met by frank incredulity: '*If she is all you say*,' would be the line taken, '*history must have strangely maligned her!*' Since those days much water had flowed under the bridge; the '*first fine careless rapture*' stage of getting to know the Empress was over; I lived next door to Farnborough Hill, saw her constantly, and by this time Lady Ponsonby must have known one wouldn't '*go on like that*' about a person without reason. But she preferred

to reiterate with provoking calm, 'My dear Ethel, I knew Eugénie before you were born' (which was not true!).

To be frank, the life of the false old legend, largely due in this case to 'esprit de contradiction,' was fostered by the Empress's one inexplicable weakness—the only commonplace thing about her—a passion for pointless Court gossip to which Madame Arcos, who also loved it and must have spent a large slice of her life collecting it, would pander by the hour, while Madame le Breton, crochet in hand, sat aloof in the bow window, rather a wicked expression on her handsome old face. I have no doubt this unfortunate passion had generally dominated conversations between the Empress and an old courtier like Lady Ponsonby, who was far too lazy, far too cynically amused at human foibles (until they bored her beyond bearing) to divert the foolish stream. But now, seeing the Empress constantly, implored by me, if only for my sake, not to *let* her start that mangy old hare, at last her eyes were opened.

I think what helped matters was my recounting an impression since then corroborated by the 'Lettres Familiales' that except her almost worship of the Prince Imperial, the profoundest emotion of the Empress's life had been her love for her sister, the Duchess of Alba, who had died in early middle life. The first anniversary of the death of Lady Ponsonby's own so deeply loved sister was, I knew, close at hand—indeed just after I had left Abergeldie she wrote, 'This is a sad week for me. Every day and night of the week before the 16th seems stamped in my brain, and sometimes during sleepless hours I can scarcely bear the vivid clearness with which I see everything in Emily's room, and the dear kind look in her eyes.' (Ah! how well I knew that same 'dear kind look' in her own eyes!) Anyhow after that autumn I was never again chafed by the feeling that one so near me, and better able than

most to appreciate altitude of soul, should undervalue the Empress.

On October 8 that happy fortnight came to an end. Maggie was helping at the impending royal theatricals, Lady Ponsonby had caught a chill—a real Balmoral chill with heavy eyes and hot hands—and so it came to pass that the only person to wish me a happy journey was the cab-driver, who, like most Scots of his type at that time, seemed to have passed the night in a whisky-vat—a Scotch improvement, perhaps, on Diogenes's tub.

At Aberdeen, much to our mutual astonishment, Rosario and I met on the platform, she having been obliged to leave Birkhall sooner than she intended. And to my still greater astonishment I found that she of all people was now a prey to Royal Culte ! True, they had been charming to her, but when it came to certain errors of vision as regards certain proceedings and personalities, one had to face the fact, that even the sanest, soundest brains you can hunt up in the most exalted pages of the *Almanach de Gotha* are not immune from this particular form of vertigo ! And when I chaffed her a little about it, she pleaded that perhaps their graciousness *had* turned her head a little ! Being of the opinion that, with his spots, the sun is a more interesting luminary than he would be without them, it was quite a comfort to detect even one tiny temporary blemish on the surface of that bright intelligence !

At Aberdeen she went off somewhere by a 5.40 train, leaving the bulk of her army of servants to proceed with the luggage to London in charge of her head butler—a sinister-looking individual, whom, meeting him in a passage at Farnborough Hill, I had taken for a certain convict recently escaped from Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum and known to be still at large. Walking up and down the platform waiting for my own train, I beheld all these

servants rush madly to the refreshment-room and settle down to a heavy meal of roast beef and grouse. This at 5-45, on the top, no doubt, of an equally heavy meal consumed at Birkhall before starting ! . . . Amazing !

My own bourne was Muirhouse, about five miles from Edinburgh, where I had so often stayed during the lifetime of my sister Alice Davidson's parents-in-law, whose eldest son, Randall, was successively Dean of Windsor and Archbishop of Canterbury, and who from the first had been one of Queen Victoria's most trusted advisers. The old people were now dead, but Alice and her husband still lived in that lovely place so adored by me. You approached it by one or other of two imposing avenues that led nowhere, a former owner, addicted to travel and culture, having about eighty years ago caused the usual Scotch turreted house to be demolished by guns procured from Edinburgh Castle, in order to build himself a new one, rather in the style of an Italian villa, on the top of the wooded steep that ran down to the sea, or rather to the Firth of Forth. As young girl, an ulster over my bathing costume, how I used to rush up and down the paths in that wood trying to store caloric enough for a plunge into the waves ! but mercifully it was now too late for bathing. Old Mr. Davidson had been an inspired landscape gardener ; here three beautiful dark red trunks of a group of Scotch firs were laid bare ; there a grassy clearing as for the revels in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Adjoining were the grander woods of Dalmeny, now at their autumn best, and at our feet a little natural harbour, really a sea-invaded quarry, in which four tiny red-funnelled excursion steamers were always put to bed for the winter. [The reader shall be spared the line of the Fife hills on the other side, the golden quivering of the water at sunset, cut by one vast stride of the Forth Bridge, and later, when night had fallen, the humbler gleaming of the lights on Burnt Island.]

I was always especially fond of this eldest sister of mine, between whom and me was one great bond, our devotion to our mother ; indeed I often said to myself that perhaps we were the only two of her children who, during her lifetime, had fully grasped what a fine nature, what uncommon gifts were for the most part obscured, distorted, even wrecked by that passionate 'undisciplined heart' of hers. There was nothing particular about Alice that jumped to the eye—just a very pleasant-looking typically Victorian woman of forty-two, full of interest in life and conspicuously kind and thoughtful for others. But behind a 'taking' little manner, slightly tinged with self-consciousness, was a fund of quiet heroism and a liberality of outlook that never ceased to astonish me. Yet certain in-bred traits are never quite got rid of. And if, as I have recounted in 'Impressions,' the squeaky 'religious' voice in which she used to say the Catechism drove us wild in the schoolroom, so even to-day, though the reverence was pitched a few notes lower, her reading of prayers when her husband was away filled me with such unprayerful emotions that I always contrived to come down late.

But never have I loved anyone more deeply. She died in the Autumn of 1933. Every sort of trouble, almost, had befallen her, and often have I thought of something Harry once quoted to me—or did he himself write the passage?—about ships of destiny unloading their heaviest burdens of lead on quays whose marble is purest and deepest below the water. To the last to look at her was to say to oneself those words from the prayer I spoke of—'O unconquerable heart !'

If the remark does not sound rather fatuous I should like to add that by no one was I better understood than by Alice. Well, after all, dogs and horses are aware when people understand them, so perhaps to mention the fact with regard to oneself need not make one feel a fool. Oddly enough, for you would not have expected it, my

brother-in-law and I were capital friends, and a visit to Muirhouse was a normal feature of every second year.

This time it was no joke getting up to the house. Night had fallen and the condition of the driver had been brought home to me at Edinburgh station by the door having been thrice opened and enquiries as to my destination wafted on three successive zephyr-blasts of whiskified air into the gloomy depths of the cab. Most of that drive I was halfway out of the window bawling directions, but, as owing to some peculiarity of eyesight the driver always put on the brake going up hill, we didn't get along very fast. At one moment, just after he had whipped up his horse and hopefully set it lumbering down a farm road, much to his astonishment his passenger, leaping out, had furiously backed the animal and herself clambered up on the box. Opening the last of the many iron gates in the park I left him to find his own way to the front door and, without ringing, dashed into the house.

They had given me up long ago ; in the drawing-room were the children, the servants, a clutch of women from the village who had been helping them over some sort of function, and for some mysterious reason a Bible reading had been going on. As I opened the door, vociferating abuse of tipsy Scotch cabmen, they were just starting a hymn, and I retired abashed, feeling like the wicked aunt in the fairy tale. But presently shuffling of feet indicated that all was over, out dashed my sister, and in spite of the function she had just been presiding over her first eager remark was : ' And now, my dear, tell us about that BRUTE Serge and why on earth the Nihilists haven't shot him long ago ? '

During the ensuing weeks, for the first time since golf-dreamings had washed everything except *Fantasio* off the slate, I found myself within distance of real links and lessons ; and oh ! the bliss of discovering that what had hitherto

been a chance meeting between club and ball personally presided over by the devil, might be tamed into a system ! Luckily swinging a club involved nothing risky for a dislocated shoulder, but alas ! it was not so with other pastimes. For instance, the children had constructed a toboggan-run down to the beach that really might have given pause to the Gadarene swine. But when I, the aunt whose tastes they had chiefly had in mind while planning the run, actually refused to go down it because of that shoulder, their faith in human nature received a shock so violent, their faces of surprise and dismay were so eloquent, that I turned and ran back to the house—ostensibly to avoid temptation, but really because I was struggling with tears which, when I reached my room, would not be denied ! . . . And I was then thirty-five !

This and another incident during that fortnight make me wonder if the stock I come from is as sound in the upper storey as I have hitherto believed. If there were not contemporary written evidence to the facts I should hardly credit them ; seeing, however, that autobiography is worthless unless—as far at least as decency allows—the writer is in the confessional, here is the second incident.

One day at North Berwick when I was having a match which a schoolmaster I had picked up, unknown to me Ben Sayers, the celebrated North Berwick golf professional, had been watching us for a hole or two, and suddenly a well-known voice behind me remarked : ‘ That was a very fine brassy shot ye made up to the tenth hole.’ At this all my passion for the game mounted into my brain, and afterwards I remembered with a touch of shame that I had felt nothing like that when Levi said what he did about *Fantasio* !

I think the explanation is that ever since I came to the years of musical discretion I had my own very clear opinion about my music, and should have had it even if none had ever shared it. But as regards golf, though aware I could never be more than a humble potterer, it was impossible to

repress the wild upsurgings of hope known to all middle-aged beginners when certain things happen—for instance when you, who had taught yourself the rudiments of the art out of the Badminton Book in a hayfield at home, were able, after one week's real teaching and intensive work, to win a gratuitous compliment from a man like Sayers ! Hence the intoxication ! When I reported my feelings to Lady Ponsonby, she began by being shocked, then angry, and then said : ' But of course you are exaggerating as usual ! ' *It was not so* ; and possibly it is something verging on mania to care as madly about these things as I have all my life.¹

Sayers was too big a swell for my purse, and it was the second professional who took me in hand ; a charming fellow with the weakness of most Scotch pros of that day. North Berwick is a pretty breezy place, but as far as the perfume of whisky went I might have been taking golf lessons in an Edinburgh fly. I think he was a splendid teacher, and one of his sayings has always haunted me : ' *Let the club-head do it !* ' That is to say, ' Don't make unnecessary efforts to *lift* the ball up into the air ; follow through and *let the club do its own work.* ' Applied to life this is a counsel of perfection for those who are over-eager, over-wishful to ' do something about it ' (my own snare). But I think that wise axiom has sometimes stayed my hand.

My sister Mary Hunter who, as I said, was one day to blossom into a noted and brilliant hostess, used to complain (privately) that whereas Edinburgh is full of interesting people, the only people Alice invited to come out to Muirhouse were relations, invalids and bores. This of course was overstating the case, but there was a certain amount of truth in it ; and wishing to make up to Alice for her adorableness about my golf talk, my *Fantasio* talk, and the perpetual excursions to neighbouring links, I did

¹ My friend Lady Balfour tells me it was the same with her brother-in-law, the late Lord Balfour, whom a hard-won victory on the links elated far more than a triumph in the House of Commons. This is reassuring.

what I knew would above all things please her—begged her to ask all the frumps of her acquaintance to tea and let me sing to them till they could bear it no more.

They came—fifteen or twenty of them—and I sang and sang, and after tea when the room was almost dark I was pressed to go on again. But on these occasions there are always people present who think enough's as good as a feast, and just as I was playing the divine introductory chords of 'Death and the Maiden' (or as the lady who asked for it, and who knew German, called it in her eagerness, 'Toad and the Maiden') someone began to whisper to her neighbour. I stopped short (as was my wont) looked at her, and started again. When all was over this lady came gushing up to me : 'How wonderful it is,' she said, 'listening to music in the dark ! It makes you feel so *drowsy and dreamy* !' Whereupon I made what I can't help thinking was a really brilliant joke : 'Yes,' I said, 'only some people *talk in their sleep*.' She didn't catch on ; probably thought I hadn't heard what she said.

A sojourn in the Highlands, followed by the bracing airs of the East Coast must evidently be a wonderful thing, for a letter to Harry, bearing the superscription '11.30 P.M.' begins thus : 'Last night I worked till 1.15 A.M. ; have golfed all day on breezy sea-side links, and after dinner, thanks to burgundy, *plus* port, *plus* coffee, *plus* Kümmel, I did one and a half hour's work and am now going to write to you !'

This must have been a special occasion, at least as regards the fluid part of the programme ; but golf and *Fantasio* really did soak up every minute of the day. Correspondence with Lady Ponsonby languished. I gathered that she had been 'playing Rip van Winkle,' as she called it, that is putting in a couple of days 'waiting' for one of the Queen's ladies, who was temporarily off the active list, thanks to long drives in an open carriage with a Royal Mistress who disliked being 'crowded up by wraps.'

A few days later I learnt that Lady Ponsonby herself had succumbed after twelve miles in the Royal barouche with next to no rugs and absolutely ceaseless rain and hail. Also that she had risen from her bed of sickness for the Gillies' Ball (sitting at dinner next the Prince of Wales—'always the pleasantest person present when he is here') and had danced a reel with Donald Stewart, the head keeper, with whom she used to walk and fish thirty years ago, and, as he reminded her, often 'stand up' when Maid of Honour at these balls. Curious to reflect that dancing a reel at her then age, sixty-one, was considered quite a feat at the time, whereas many of the most mobile women who now adorn London ballrooms are nearer seventy than sixty, so I am told. But it is true that crawling about the floor like half-dead November flies is one thing, and dancing reels another.

When the time came for leaving Muirhouse and wending my way southwards, I spent two rapturous days at North Berwick staying with the Willie Mures, and there realised what cruel heartless brutes a devouring passion makes of us. Harry was to be in England for a week, and when he wrote proposing a meeting, I had the effrontery to suggest that he should come for those two days to an hotel at North Berwick—he who loathed the very name of golf! I knew exactly what would happen, but couldn't, *couldn't* give up North Berwick! One night I dined with him at his hotel, the next he dined with the Mures. Mr. Mure was a typical steady-going Scotsman (also a very fine golfer) and to my amazement he was absolutely bowled over by Harry. 'What a clever amusing fellow your friend is,' he volunteered next day. I said, 'I half expected you to be put off by his fluffy hair and foreign ways.' But Mr. Mure sailed over that remark and added: 'I never saw such a clever man with such a quiet unassuming manner,' and I thought more highly than ever of the Scots.

Otherwise poor Harry had a detestable time, and all I can plead in defence of my outrageous conduct is that I knew he would be over for a longish time about Christmas. I golfed all day, lunched rapidly with him at his hotel, and not till darkness fell did I rejoin him there, study the draft of a new book he was writing, 'The Statuette and the Background,' and act more or less like a friend. One day he sallied forth to watch me having a lesson, and coming too close got a crack from me on the head. But my heart had turned into a golf ball and I didn't pretend that it hurt me more than it hurt him. We did a little strolling on safe parts of the links, but it was blowing an equinoctial gale—or, if not, some other kind of gale—and whatever we talked about half my mind was on my golf instructor's 'last remark but one.'

After he was gone I evidently suffered from remorse and conveyed the fact to him in suitable words ; for he wrote me that he was studying theology, and that this experience, demonstrating 'the freakiness of the Holy Ghost,' convinced him that the Holy Ghost is a woman built on the pattern of a revolving light of uncertain periods. 'You run after her to Scotland and bang your head against darkness and a golf club ; you turn back, and she sends gentle beams after you across the sea' (I was glad about the gentle beams). 'Such,' he adds, 'are the mysteries and beauties of theology.'

Rather by good fortune, while he was at North Berwick, a letter had arrived from Lady Ponsonby raising an old, old point ; wondering how he could put up with my megrims—in other words accept the régime of austerity which I imposed upon our relation. 'You say she is more accessible to French than to English modes of thought,' he remarked when I told him about it. Then, taking up a volume of Montaigne's 'Essays'—he rarely travelled without one—and pointing to a certain passage, 'Refer her to that,' he said, 'perhaps she'll understand then.'

Here is the passage :

‘ Un galant homme n’abandonne pas sa poursuite pour être refusé, pourvu que se soit un refus de chasteté, non de choix. Nous avons beau jurer, et menacer, et nous plaindre ; nous mentons, nous les en aimons mieux. C’est stupidité et lâcheté de s’opiniâtrer contre la haine et le mépris ; mais contre une résolution vertueuse et constante, mêlée d’une volonté reconnaissante, c’est l’exercice d’une âme noble et généreuse. Elles peuvent reconnaître nos services jusques à certaine mesure, et nous faire sentir honnêtement qu’elles ne nous dédaignent pas.’ (Livre III. Chap. V.)

Most people understand French, but for those who don’t, here is the gist of the above passage. If a woman turns you down as lover from moral scruples (he says) that is no reason for abandoning the pursuit ; the man may curse and swear but he respects and loves her the more for her resistance. To persist in the face of *hatred* or *contempt* is stupid and cowardly, but to combat a *virtuous* and *constant resolution* is an exercise worthy of a noble and generous soul, and will excite no woman’s contempt. And he further suggests that at the bottom of her heart the adored one is perhaps grateful for the homage.

Exactly. Harry knew, and I knew, that when the right hour struck, the ‘ *résolution vertueuse et constante* ’ would take unto itself wings. And above all he knew that, recognising what type of man he was, I loved him all the more for his patience.

As a matter of fact the hour was not so very distant after all, and one day I went to Paris expressly to hear it strike. This book will come to an end before then so the story cannot be told here. But lest I do not live to tell it elsewhere, Lady Ponsonby’s comment shall be preserved in these pages.

She was not best pleased at my news, partly I think because not informed till two or three months afterwards,

and then in quite a casual manner. Hence perhaps her very unexpected remark : ‘ One can understand a *surprise des sens*,’ she said, ‘ but I don’t like that sort of *cold-blooded schemin*.’

And here is a general comment on my friendship with Harry, made to Lady Ponsonby by a rather venomous but extremely amusing connection of hers who habitually left out unnecessary parts of speech : ‘ Ethel not like idea old maid so trumped up little affair.’

CHAPTER XVII

(AUTUMN 1893 TO SPRING 1894)

FROM North Berwick I went to Selaby, firmly resolved not to hunt, and believing that thanks to the golf passion I could endure without too much heartache the sight of hounds and horses, pink coats and habits. The season was just beginning, scent was excellent, foxes plentiful, and owing to Mary having sprained her knee her horses were crying to be ridden. How long I could have borne the anguish I don't know but it was suddenly put an end to by a letter from home.

During my absence in Scotland either Alice or Mary had been keeping Papa company, and were rather bothered about him. They thought he was depressed at the departure of the Hippisleys, whose presence brought military visitors from Aldershot—which he delighted in—and who had now set up for themselves nearer Dick's work. Not that he would be lonely, with both Nina and Violet close at hand, but the prospect of Frimhurst being let or sold and the business about Bob's allowance bothered him. It wasn't his way to harp on unpleasant subjects, but they knew what was in his mind. For the first time in his life, too, he had been suffering from rheumatism and loss of appetite. And now, wrote Alice, he was really ill ; white and unlike himself ; adding that she had to be away for two days and didn't at all like leaving him alone. Of course I went home at once, and his appearance greatly disquieted me ; whatever his indisposition—and seemingly the doctor was puzzled—it altered his habits, and that seemed so uncanny.

The question of finding a smaller house had now to be vigorously tackled, and I shall never forget how the Empress threw herself into the matter, driving about here and there, inspecting possible places, and discussing with me how best to arrange things for his comfort ; all this in an earnest concentrated way you would hardly expect from your nearest and dearest. Ah ! in time of need who in the world rang truer than she ?

Meanwhile, as anyone who knew him could have foretold, Papa had no notion of knuckling under, and at the end of November wouldn't hear of our giving up a dinner to which he was much looking forward with the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, who were then living at Bagshot Park and whose gracious kindness to him and his none of us will ever forget. I remember that a day or two afterwards I met the Duke by chance, and without giving me any particular reason (and I think he had one) he said, ' I fear your father is very ill.' Indeed he was, and by that time it looked like a violent attack of gout that would not come out properly and went to his stomach and heart.

About a week after that dinner, one morning when they took him his early tea, he was lying semi-conscious across his bed, and I always think, though the doctor would not allow it, he had had a slight stroke. Twice during the ensuing week he seemed at the point of death. But then came a wonderful rally. His head was absolutely clear, and though he couldn't raise himself in bed without help, he was quite convinced he was getting better, as interested in public affairs as ever, as keen on listening to such leading articles in *The Times* as squared with his views, and according to his nurses was the most cheerful, contented, and (they implied) adorable elderly patient they had ever come across. Both of them thought he would pull through, and so did I. Of course he would never again be the man he was before, but given his immense vitality, the keenness of his interest in whatever was going on, and his habit of

making the best of things, he would be able to enjoy life even if tied to a wheeled chair. But the doctors shook their heads and said he was merely living on his magnificent constitution and not making flesh.

During these days came a half comic yet rather sad little episode in the shape of a distraught letter from Kitty who was in Leipzig and of course unaware of the tragedy going on at Frimhurst. I had always known that some day she would learn the story of Harry and me, very likely in a mangled version ; this letter told me she now 'knew all' ; that at first her faith in human beings had been shattered to bits, but that now she saw the whole thing was probably beyond her comprehension, and that in any case she 'did not *judge* but rather *pitied* and *loved* more than ever before.'

It was the dear, rather incoherent, letter of a girl of seventeen, and one can imagine my reply—a very loving one—saying I had done nothing that need make her think less well of me. I had foreseen, I added, that this moment would come, but had wished her to meet it as best she could. Also, that possibly I might never explain matters. This letter was crossed by an agonised second one from her, wishing she had never written the first, imploring me to forget it, and so on. How well I could imagine the shock, the relentless working of imagination . . . poor little Kitty ! I wrote a consolatory line, assuring her (which is the case) that such episodes either wreck or strengthen affection between two people, and that she could guess which it was with me. But Papa's illness left little time for letter writing.

Meanwhile either Alice or Mary were now always at Frimhurst, and I combined running the house as well as I could with work ; for, as the sisters knew, dates of competitions are immutable things. Then Christmas Day came

round, and knowing that it would please Papa I went to church. The music was appalling, the sermon not even that. Nervous exasperation induced a curious state of mind, and I went home feeling like an atheistical anarchist with delirium tremens.

This condition, which I really think was bordering on madness, lasted till the Servants' Ball at Farnborough Hill on the following night, when the spectacle of Madame le Breton's '*inépuisable jeunesse*,' as Monsieur Pietri put it, of her enchanting grace and go, as, looking astonishingly handsome, she danced a *contredanse* with an elderly French valet, was enough to restore anyone to sanity and equilibrium. Papa had made no enquiries as to the Christmas sermon, but took immense interest in this performance of Madame le Breton, who was at least six or seven years older than he. And he was much amused when I told him that the Empress had been secretly longing to look in at the ball but had not been allowed to by Madame le Breton who thought it would be considered undignified. 'I think she was very wrong,' said our sociable, party-loving parent.

By the New Year he was really better, very cheery, and more convinced than ever that he was mending. Lucky; for I had been cast for a rapid resumption of the Universal Aunt rôle, to think of which now seems like a dream. Kitty had come over to Selaby for Christmas. I knew she had been seeing a great deal at Leipzig of my old friend Johanna Röntgen, who figured so largely in 'Impressions that Remained'—the same who returned a volume I had lent her of Maupassant with the remark that her Bible, her Shakespeare, and her Goethe were good enough for her and that she had no use for 'French filth.' It was Johanna too who, supported by her sister and her sister's *fiancé*, had clambered one Easter morning to the top of the dome of St. Peter's, and while the congregation below was engaged in what they called 'pagan orgies,' had

stepped out on to the balcony and thundered forth the Lutheran hymn, 'Ein fester Burg ist unser Gott,' to the benighted roofs of Rome.

She was deeply musical, very plain, very religious, and dragged her hair back tightly from her forehead *à la Chinoise*. Kitty was really fond of Johanna who at that time was approaching forty, and judging by the tomes I received on the subject Johanna adored Kitty.

Now in a previous chapter I related how my niece had come back from Paris talking French admirably but with little airs of perky frivolity which sat strangely on her, and which we hoped Teutonic seriousness would correct. It did ; but what no one bargained for was, that under Johanna's puritanic influence a wholesale repudiation of worldliness would set in, and that she would return to her family exhibiting, among other symptoms of austerity, a *coiffure* exactly copied from Johanna's ! I was told that confronted by this Chinese apparition on the stairs, her father's face was a study ; and when the frivolous Phyllis remarked that her appearance was enough to frighten the crows and enquired what the point could be of making such an object of oneself, the grave answer was : '*I wish to be loved for my own sake !*' Of course my sister made short work of all this, but poor Kitty never heard the last of that remark.

On January 2 I shepherded my considerably smartened-up niece back to Germany, and again we stopped for a couple of days at Amsterdam. Julius Röntgen's enthusiasm about the Mass was an old story, but he had only *two* Choral concerts each season, and his Directors, whom he called the Elders, had yet to be won. As usual difficulties bristled ; Masses were not supposed to be popular, he said, and even if I got round the Elders, who up to now frankly discounted his report of the music, the thought of the public's natural distrust of female composers—a thing likely to affect receipts—would haunt them, and, once my back

was turned, might easily outweigh other considerations. Still, unwilling to abandon hope, the dear fellow had arranged an evening gathering—this was why we were stopping at Amsterdam—at which I was to play the Mass to a little group of notable music lovers including four of the paramount Directors.

Clothes? What about them? One of my perennial difficulties was that men who praised my work—even men like Levi, Mottl, and later Bruno Walter—were always suspected by other men, and particularly by selection committees, of being influenced by other than musical considerations! I am quite sure I never had what is nowadays called 'sex appeal,' nor was the incipient militant suffragette of the soft, sweet, clinging type which I firmly believe will always be man's ideal. But men are very kind and catholic—in a word remarkably large-minded—on this particular field, and after all I was youngish and not ill-looking; in fact my shrewd old friend Professor Wach had remarked years ago that nothing but age and ugliness would do away with this tiresome handicap. Well then, on the present occasion should I aim at the frump type or make myself as presentable as possible? Madame le Breton had had no doubts on the subject. '*Les hommes étant tels qu'ils sont,*' she urged '*il faudrait rien négliger qui pourrait les bien disposer pour vous.*' Consequently it was with carefully braided hair, as Papa always put it, and arrayed in her most becoming gown, that Susannah sat down at the piano, trusting the Elders would do their part. And behold them by degrees warming up, crowding round her and saying: '*Röntgen told us . . . but we wouldn't believe him*'! Julius was beside himself with joy (for was it not his parents who, in the old Leipzig days, sixteen years ago, had first 'discovered' me?) and whispered to Kitty that the battle of Amsterdam was won. As a matter of fact, about a month later the Mass was definitely put on the prospectus of the next season.

At Leipzig, where I had the joy of at last introducing Kitty to the Wachs, I again played the Mass to a collection of old friends, among whom the kind Limburgers, who were giving the party, had tactfully invited a few of the leading lights of the Gewandhaus Committee. The effect was the same as elsewhere, but I never had much hope of Leipzig, for the conductor, whose third wife was now having her third baby, and who was an indefatigable begetter, whether of children or of 'Conductor's Music,' as the Germans call it, detested the work of Brahms and all other composers ; and I had never gone out of my way to simulate admiration of his ten or fifteen symphonies.

Well, after a two days' sojourn in dear Leipzig, I left Kitty in the charge of her enraptured Johanna and turned homewards, trying my luck on the way at Halle, where there was an admirable chorus whose conductor had greatly admired Herzogenberg in days gone by. Unfortunately he was in bed, suffering from what his wife with German precision in the matter of ailments called 'Bowel-Catarrh.' The piano score had greatly interested 'mein Mann,' she said ; could I wait two or three days ? I couldn't, and mentally giving up Halle rushed back to Frimhurst.

Followed weeks such as many, many watchers by sick beds are called upon to endure as best they can, a joyful belief that the patient will pull through after all alternating with passionate hope that the end may not be too long delayed. The ups and downs were baffling, but through them all his mind remained fairly vigorous, and early in February it really looked as if he might soon be wheeled into another room.

Then, suddenly came a change ; his interest in what was going on slackened ; the leading articles in *The Times* were dropped, and though he still insisted on the Summary of News being read to him every morning, one saw he was not really taking it in. The thighs of this big strong man

might now be spanned by one's two hands, and for the first time since his illness he seemed to wish to be alone. On February 14 there was a Celebration of the Holy Communion in his bedroom, at which only he, Alice, and I were present, followed by another surprising rally . . . after which he once more began slipping down the hill. And so it went on, his mood, whenever he was called upon to make some little effort, always cheery and contented. But his drowsiness increased. The nurse told me that one morning he woke up, asked what day of the week it was, and said, 'I ought to be on the Bench to-day!' She replied, 'You're not well enough to go yet, General,' and saying, 'No, I suppose I'm not,' he drowsed off again. I don't think he was absolutely himself for more than a few minutes at a time—perhaps sixty, distributed over the twenty-four hours—and as the doctors said it might go on like this for weeks, Bob, who was hunting up at Selaby, applied for a further extension of leave.

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We sat down and waited for the end. The hardest part was interviewing the endless succession of people of all sorts and conditions, who came up to the house hoping to take a little hope home with them. No one I think can ever have been more respected and loved than my father.

Now and then when one of the sisters was in the house I contrived to get a breath of fresh air into my brain, without which I think work would have come to a standstill. Once or twice I spent a few hours at Norman Tower, or stayed a night there, and one day Lady Ponsonby drove all the way from Windsor to Frimhurst: 'I wanted to see your home,' she said, 'before it is given up.' And I certainly spent one night at Lambeth, and am reminded by a surviving letter from Mrs. Benson of a question she put to me and of my reply. How, she asked, did this slow fading out of life of my father affect me? I answered that

distressing as such an experience must be—even when, as in this case, there is no pain nor, I think, much discomfort—I was only thankful for it, because the spectacle of his never-failing pluck and cheeriness, and above all of his non-thought about himself, would leave an impression of his personality behind him that might not otherwise have come to me in this fulness. For though we were capital friends and of one mind on political and all public questions ; though anyone easier to live with could not be imagined ; and though, in his inarticulate way, he was, according to other people, ‘ proud ’ of me, yet he had never understood, approved of, or cared much for me.

This was inevitable. Built as he was, to ‘ approve ’ of his third daughter would have meant that his instincts were weakening, which I should have hated. Also to go about expecting people to ‘ understand ’ you, unless in the case of someone you loved, had always seemed to me ridiculous ; in fact Mrs. Benson had some wonderful story of an old lady who declared she had known me when I was fifteen, and that I once said to her, ‘ I am the most interesting person I know *and I don't care if no one else thinks so !* ’ (I seem to remember an incident of this kind !) Moreover, if you have had one parent who saw everything there was to be seen of you, and not only approved of but loved you, that is more than many rebellious daughters can bargain for.

Among all these stolen spells of respite, one stands out with peculiar vividness—partly perhaps because it was the very last, and such a strange contrast with the immediate sequel.

One morning—I think it was on the 29th or 30th of March—I actually finished *Fantasio*, that is, absolutely completed the rough piano score, which is the most important part of opera building. My father had been definitely losing ground, the moments of conscious participation in life were becoming fewer and farther between, and now he

lay practically all day in a coma. Yet his pulse was so strong, his breathing so easy, that the doctor foresaw no immediate change. So I put a nightgown and toothbrush into a bag (suitcases were not yet invented), sent off a wire, and arrived at Norman Tower in time for dinner.

Betty Montgomery was there and we all had a hot discussion about a book that had just appeared, 'La Romance d'une Impératrice,' the Impératrice being Catherine of Russia, whose frank animality repelled Betty, whereas I maintained it was preferable to the amorous half-measures that prevailed in her world. (She herself, however, was a particularly devoted wife!) At last Maggie got so bored with what she called 'the ceaseless sexuality' of our conversation, that after dinner she announced she was going out to play a Haydn sonata with a Canon's wife—which she actually did, there being a handy one in the Cloisters. Next morning, coming down late and finding the same discussion raging round the eggs and bacon, 'I *did* hope,' she remarked, 'that we were sexless at breakfast anyhow.'

Betty's great friend, whom Lady Ponsonby delighted in, Mrs. Willie Grenfell as she was then, came to luncheon. She belonged to a category described by Maggie as 'Femmes aux hommes,' but unlike many men's women was not above making a conquest of members of her own sex if she liked them. A dazzling apparition, young, beautiful, exquisitely dressed, as rich in brains as in charm, seizing the vital point of each shade in our four-part talk (Maggie had gone to lunch with Freda Biddulph, declaring we were all too clever for her) it seemed as if she held every card needed in the game of life it was given her both by circumstances and preference to play. And it was easy to believe what I heard, that in that galaxy of shining lights nicknamed The Souls, by far the most brilliant of the female-luminaries was Ettie Grenfell.

As I said afterwards to Lady Ponsonby, one thing has

always intrigued me, not only with regard to Betty's friend but concerning other examples of the same type and of either sex. When a person's equipment is abnormally rich, when the art of pleasing has been brought to the highest possible degree of perfection, it is hard to guess to what precise extent moral problems such as were discussed that day at Norman Tower, and which seemed to be what Mrs. Grenfell had most at heart, really preoccupy and matter to these charmers. It is, alas ! rarely that I have the luck to cross the path of Ettie Desborough, with whom at one tragic moment of her life I was temporarily in touch.¹ All the same, being so much more her senior now than I seemed to myself to be in the past, I still hope sooner or later to put up this question for discussion between us. But merely from curiosity, just as a good thesis to toss to and fro across the net ; for of what earthly consequence can it be which way the reply might run ? Certain brands of 'supériorité' in the French sense are what they are by divine right, and the recipe for making a charmer is known to the gods. Which is all that matters.

That afternoon as I walked into the house they told me that Papa had taken the right turn at last and was now well on the road that dips down steeply to death. He lingered I think for twenty-four hours, unconscious and with closed eyes. Then, at the very last, came the strange moment I was to witness again fourteen years afterwards when Harry died. Lifting his head slightly, he opened his eyes wide and seemed to be gazing with wonder at some beautiful thing we could not see. Then his head dropped again and he was dead.

There is nothing more to say except that a year or two

¹ She had flattered and moved me deeply by suggesting that I should set Julian Grenfell's immortal poem 'Into Battle' to music. But I hold that some poems stand so magnificently alone that to tamper with them in another medium is to paint the lily. And I hope I converted her to that view.

later, when for the first time I read 'The Trial and Death of Socrates,' feeling how that final scene in the prison illumines the rest of his life for us I began thinking of my father. How I had hated him as a young girl for opposing my musical dreams ! how thankful I was that he had lived long enough for me to see him fairly and impersonally, and to understand the inevitability of that past clash of wills ! And finally, what a clear light his slow passing had cast backwards along the path he had walked through life—how his personality had shone out in those months of weakness and defeat !

It will not, I believe, seem ridiculous that his name should be mentioned in the same breath with that of the greatest man after Christ who has ever lived, if the reader bears in mind that it is only by way of illustrating the thought that death sometimes tells us more about life than life itself. Wise, simple, vigorous-minded, modest, liberal in his outlook in most ways, accepting in silence and humility the decrees of fate, believing utterly in God and that He knows best, my father, taken all in all, was one of the best men I have ever known.

EPILOGUE

I HAVE now brought my story such as it is to the moment when, with the death of my father and the sale of Frimhurst, a sort of English celibate's version of *Monsieur, Madame, et Bébé*, which might be entitled *Composer, Servant, and Dog*, was inaugurated in a little eight-roomed cottage not three miles from our old home. The last occupants of the two living-rooms had been a pony and a donkey ; but that was two years ago, and after a thorough cleansing and overhauling—also the installation of conveniences not insisted on by four-footed tenants—‘One Oak,’ as I christened it, became the dwelling one had dreamed of but never expected to find.¹

In the Prologue to this book I remarked that composition is for some of us such an expensive business that if investments go wrong it may have to be abandoned. And I even threatened to explain (very shortly) how such a situation comes about, being qualified to do so from painfully first-hand knowledge. But before making the attempt I think it permissible once more to throw chronology to the winds, and describe what turned out to be, little as I realised it at the time, an enchanting drop-curtain to over forty years of musical activity.

(a) A JUBILEE JAMBOREE

In the year 1933 fell my seventy-fifth birthday, which event drew forth a very charmingly worded letter, signed by most of our leading musicians, suggesting that a Festival be given in honour of a colleague who was, I believe, the

¹ *Streaks of Life* : A fresh start and two portraits.



MARCO AND THE AUTHOR AT ONE OAK, 1894

eldest extant specimen of the British Composer, and who, according to the Psalmist, should have been put down painlessly five years ago. (One of the signatories would, I fancy, have been quite ready to drop the 'painless' part, but that is a detail.)

Spontaneous tributes are usually worked up in the sweat of their brows by single individuals. In my case the moving spirit, to mention whose name would be the one thing he would never forgive, was the sole person who had spiritual weight, practical leverage, and friendship enough for me and my work to put such an enterprise through. And the underlying idea was, that after this projected display of specimens of forty years' work—most of it practically unknown—an English composer, who so far had been relegated to operations in backwaters, might at long last find herself happily travelling the main line of traffic.

In order to meet expenses £400 had to be raised privately, and this four wonderful friends of mine undertook to do—and did. Thinking back to the year 1889 when I had first stepped into the musical arena, 'This Festival,' I said to myself 'will be like the final flare-up at the end of a display of fireworks'; and indeed there is a striking analogy between a prolonged pyrotechnic display and the career of a composer, damp squibs and all.

Events were ushered in by a memorable scene on Woking Golf Course. The afternoon of the day on which the Festival had been announced in the morning papers, I was engaged in what may by courtesy be styled a game of golf with an elderly, rather stately acquaintance, who, I fancy, had hitherto not realised the advanced age of her opponent. Anyhow, when, on the third tee, I pulled off what was for me a brilliant drive, she exclaimed in an outburst: 'Really, Dame Ethel, you are *wonderful*!' 'Yes,' I replied, 'I'm like Sarah, only in a different line of business.' Whereupon, looking thoroughly bewildered, after a moment's hesitation she murmured politely, 'Oh, *not at all*!' (Strange, by the

way, how some jokes seem foredoomed to shipwreck. When this anecdote was passed on to an exceptionally intelligent great-nephew of mine—one who knows his Bible, too—there was again a moment of hesitation, after which he remarked doubtfully, ‘*I suppose you meant Sarah Bernhardt.*’)

As for the Festival itself, I ask readers to imagine what it means to a composer if, at the eleventh hour, among other things her first and her last big choral works, the *Mass* and *The Prison*, are held up in the blazing sunlight by one of the most astounding personalities that this or any country has produced—my old-new friend Thomas Beecham. Not only had he offered to conduct the two big choral and orchestral concerts—a graceful, gracious, and kindly act such as we are accustomed to from him—but he rendered the music as I had never hoped to hear it ; and what is more, as if he himself loved it !

Now apart from his confession, registered elsewhere, that nearly all music bores him, I had fancied from what I know of his preferences regarding modern work that he could not care much about *Smyth* music, however warm his friendship for the composer. If that be so, his inspired rendering of it is one more proof of the diabolical cleverness of that authentic but exceedingly bewildering genius, Thomas Beecham.¹

How I would like to extend myself over various details of that Festival, particularly the final concert at the Albert Hall, including my proud sojourn in the Royal Box. This was a surprise-honour for which the recipient was so inadequately equipped, that at the close of Part I, returning, after the usual platform acknowledgments, to the upper ether, she realised that all this time a certain woolly undergarment must have been clearly visible through the gauze sleeves of an almost new best gown. Needless to say if

¹ Since writing the above I hear he really *does* like *The Prison* !

Royal eyes marked what was amiss not a quiver of Royal eyelids betrayed the fact ; and, without reference to that particular incident, while in that box I noted many little touches of human sympathy and intuition which explain why the Queen's popularity, though never directly sought, permeates all classes ; trifles that increase one's sense of what the great ones of the earth can give other mortals, providing their souls are so tempered that the fierce ordeal of occupying a throne leaves them unscathed.

After the concert came the improvised ' Mad Tea Party ' at an adjacent Lyons, where the guests paid for their own tea and buns, and whence one patroness of music, finding herself for the first time in her life in such a low place, fled *a prima vista*—in other words ' did a bunk.' O what fun it was, though we of the family, Nina, Nelly, Bob and I, were thinking of three sisters who during their lifetime had faithfully followed my musical fortunes year after year, and of whom two, Alice and Mary, had died only a few months ago. And I am certain many besides us were thinking of Mary, who had always undertaken my post-concert entertaining, and done it so splendidly. Of course if she had been alive Lyons would never have taken place, but it made us laugh to think how she would have loathed it and its suggestion of a new sort of harum-scarum school feast at which the unfortunate children pay for their own victuals. That wonderful collection of friends new and old—Joyce Wethered, Laura Lovat, Thomas Beecham, Hugh Allen, Violet Gordon Woodhouse, Virginia Woolf, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, Maud Warrender, Diana Cooper, Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, Ethel Steel of the Royal School, Bath—greatest of Head Mistresses (seated on an umbrella-stand full of umbrellas) and many who are less well known but equally cherished by me—all these might doubtless have been got together elsewhere, but at the price of foregoing a memory the comic value of which Time will, I fancy, be powerless to efface.

(b) WHYS AND WHEREFORES

I began this book by saying that it is not addressed primarily to musicians ; nor is it about music, which to my mind is a thing to write and to listen to but not to talk about. Yet behold me constrained by the nature of my task to deal willy-nilly if not exactly with music, yet with some of the alarums and excursions incidental to a composer's career. I think I can promise not to make heavy weather of it, but nevertheless I cordially invite those for whom I really write—Mr. and Mrs. Everyman and family—to skip all the rest of this chapter, except the final paragraphs, beginning at the words ' I intended the above passage to be the last,' on page 307.

It may have puzzled certain readers when I said my friend hoped by this Festival to get my output at long last into the main stream. ' But *aren't* you in the main stream now ? ' such a one might ask.

Ah ! it's a queer business ! Because I have conducted my own operas and love sheepdogs ; because I generally dress in tweeds, and sometimes, at winter afternoon concerts, have even conducted in them ; because I was a militant suffragette and seized a chance of beating time to ' The March of the Women ' from the window of my cell in Holloway Prison with a tooth-brush ; because I have written books, spoken speeches, broadcast, and don't always make sure that my hat is on straight ; for these and other equally pertinent reasons, in a certain sense I am well known. If I buy a pair of boots in London, and not having money enough produce an envelope with my name, the parcel is pressed into my hand : ' We want no reference in *your* case, madam ! '

This is celebrity indeed !—or shall we say notoriety ?—but it does not alter the fact that after having been on the job, so to speak, for over forty years, I have never yet

succeeded in becoming even a tiny wheel in the English music machine ; nor did this fantastic latter-day notoriety even pave the way—that much it really might have done !—to inclusion in programme schemes ! To-day, when, as a beautiful phrase of T. S. Eliot's puts it, ' age and forgetfulness have sweetened memory,' it is possible, without one single grain of animus, to examine the cause of what Bret Harte calls ' this thushness.'

Discussing the situation which my powerful friend hoped the Festival might modify, one sympathetic and highly intelligent well-wisher, Constant Lambert, ascribed it to my having taken to opera and concentrated on Germany. Luckily for Mr. Lambert he and most of the younger men who count in music to-day were not even in their cradles in the 'nineties. But those who have done me the honour of reading thus far will have learned that not till I had knocked my knuckles raw on the closed doors of England's concert halls did my eyes swerve back again across the Channel. For I had always loved England as passionately as I do to-day when patriotism is at a discount. (And well it may be, seeing what is being done in its name !)

Wishing to enjoy the writing of this autobiography, and if possible make pleasant reading of it, I have dwelt at length on one only of the checks met with on the threshold of my music life (an incident which, by the by, furnishes a curious *pendant* to a certain reference to that Mass in *Grove's Dictionary of Music*, 2nd edit. 1908). And the addition of the words ' Thus it went on for forty years ' enabled the writer to pass lightly over similar incidents for the rest of the book.

Now it may be said that hundreds of artists are called on to endure the like, but in my case was a disheartening element no man has to cope with—that only men of great imaginative power and intellectual integrity can picture to themselves—an instinct borne out later by our struggle for

the Suffrage (which J. S. Mill believed to be won in 1860) that given my sex, my foreign musical education, and the conditions of English music life as I was coming to know them, if I were ever to win through at all it would not be till I had one leg in the grave. And there was I, crotchets and quavers racing round and round in my head like mice in a barn, seething with musical desire, and knowing that unless a composer tries out his work in public he is like a painter who should paint in the cellar. I believed I had something to say, but as far as my countrymen went was seemingly alone in that opinion, for, like its forerunners, the Mass had gone to the bottom, leaving not even a ripple on the surface.

Then, as told above, almost by chance in the capacity of Universal Aunt I revisited haunts in Germany where years ago I had been considered a promising neophyte, bringing with me two ripe works—the Mass, and the pianoforte score of a three-act Opera. I will not elaborate the effect produced, beyond saying that if I had ever lacked self-confidence that little composer's tour would have made good the deficiency. In one of the Letter Sections¹ is an allusion to a certain phrase, addressed by Hermann Levi (vicariously) to Barnby by way of binging him up. It was like that everywhere.

None the less, of those foreign performances of the Mass, believed by me to be as certain as the arrival of Christmas, *not one materialised*; and in each case the reasons, as reported by faithful friends on the spot, were the same: (1) My sex: (2) The fact that apparently I was quite unknown in England. CHECKMATE!

Then, as a baffled mountain climber faced by an unscalable wall of rock might one day light on a cleft—a chimney is, I think, the technical term—up which with luck he can scramble, and leaving fogs and pestilential

¹ E. S. to Lady Ponsonby, p. 310.

vapours below him emerge into pure air and sunshine, so it was with me when Levi insisted so strongly on the dramatic vein he found in the Mass (and I remembered that Herzogenberg had said something of the sort in the early days of my pupildom). Opera, said Levi, was far the strongest part of German musical life ; the operatic public demanded novelties and cared not two straws about a composer's nationality. Again, it appeared that the leading idea of operatic conductors was to cut each other down in the matter of unearthing and producing interesting new works ; and best of all, as I explained above, half the theatres were Court Theatres subsidised by their Prince, where the absurd old Schiller and Goethe theory, that artistic worth comes first and financial results second, still lingered, as belonging to the *noblesse oblige* tradition.

Here at last was a gleam of light ! To concentrate on opera was no hardship to one whom the idea of creating human beings and clothing them in music drew like a magnet. And once a foreign performance had been achieved, surely the Home Faculty would not persist in denying one access to the paradise of one's dreams (for I was both poor and ambitious), namely the classic exhibition ground of indigenous talent, where the scenery is strongly choral, where native produce goes gaily round and round the mulberry bush, and where automatically, as a matter of course, reputations are built up and royalties raked in (to be divided between publisher and composer). Need I specify geographically ? . . . three western Cathedral towns . . . most of the industrial cities in the provinces (not to speak of London) . . . are they not dotted about all over the map ? Yes ! a foreign Opera House would surely provide the *Open Sesame* for England !

This idea I kept steadily in view for many years, and in the intervals of operatic adventures abroad every sort of ammunition was turned out wherewith to attack our own strongholds . . . short choral works, orchestral and

chamber works, songs ; everything, I think, except a Reverie for Pianoforte and Comb—a regrettable omission, for that might have done the trick. And with each new essay the knocking at doors would be hopefully resumed.

To-day it almost makes me laugh (except when the wind is in the East) to reflect on the utter fruitlessness of these efforts. During the fifteen or twenty years after the date at which this record closes (1894), nothing achieved on the Continent, including the production of three operas at leading Opera Houses and two or three big concerts at Paris and Vienna, had any noticeable repercussion in our concert world. Goethe has said that one solitary performance of a work of art (he was speaking, I think, of dramatic productions at Court Theatres) was ‘an insanity, a crime against civilisation and an insult to an author.’ But if, after unheard of efforts, helped out perhaps by such financial inducement as I could offer, one single minor work was smuggled into a programme, it achieved a single, generally under-rehearsed performance, and that was the end of that. During the reign of Mr. William Boosey, in him and Henry Wood I had good friends ; but, as Sir Edgar Speyer remarked later, what is the good of playing the work of someone who is not in the swim ? *It lets down your programme*, he said, and leads to nothing. A very sound remark from the commercial point of view.

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The difficulty in my case has been that from the very first (as may be seen in that all-conclusive letter from Messrs. Novello, p. 174) for some reason or other what I call ‘the Machine’ was against me.

If you ask me, ‘What is the Machine ?’ I can only answer, ‘I don’t know,’ but apparently it is a complex construction, made up, say, of units from every section of our music life ; heads of Musical Colleges, leading publishers, dominant members of music committees throughout the country, the Press, and so on. Of course this is the wildest

guess-work, but though the motions of its spirit are so veiled and mysterious that to try and follow them makes you giddy, once you are up against it there is no doubting its existence. And of that lucrative, reputation-making mulberry-bush dance referred to above, the Machine is organiser and M.C., having of course annexes all over the country.

Another materialisation of the same idea—collective responsibility—functions to-day at the B.B.C., though an attempt to describe its nature is, again, rather like describing China when you have never been there and have to depend on the tales of other travellers. There, again, you have a mysterious complex composed of various units, a collection of *chefs* who are responsible for England's musical meals; some for the joints, some for the entrées, and some (far the most important people on the staff) for the kickshaws; in short a *Società Anonima* summed up under the generic term 'Music Director' (or in the provinces 'Conductor'). But in all these cases you will be doing somebody grave injustice if you mix up active agents and connecting links—the child with the umbilical cord.

It is possible that modern industrialised music—and particularly a huge concern like the B.B.C.—cannot be run on any other system, disquieting though the reflection may be in a country like England which is more interested in money-making than in art. You think this is an exaggeration? Then listen to the considered opinion of Sir Landon Ronald, a very clever man who knows what he is talking about, and who recently in genial after-dinner mood spoke the following words: 'I feel that in this country nothing succeeds like *financial* success, and that artistic ideals and aims count for little *unless they happen to pay*'; the nation of shopkeepers, you see, following Shakespeare's advice and remaining true to itself, but unfortunately in the wrong place. For when machines, committees, and groups decide these matters, do not hope to turn out mighty figures in music such as many we have known: Levi, Mahler,

Nikisch, Richter, Muck, Mottl, Bruno Walter, and the like—flaming torches of men raised in the land where the greatest of all musical traditions was built up by composers who penetrated deeper into the heart of music than those of any other nation. Whether on Parnassus or at Jerusalem you cannot serve Mammon and God.

In one thing I was fortunate. Opera being no part of our regular music life it was outside the sphere of the Machine's operation. Here Society had a say; Royal Ladies whose princely relatives had enabled me to produce my operas in Germany had a say; and a very remarkable woman, Miss Lilian Baylis, had a say. The *Wreckers* week in 1909 was financed by a noble-hearted American woman who was £600 out of pocket on the venture. . . . But all this will be told in what should be a really comic paper I hope to write some day called 'The Wrecks of the Wreckers.' Did not Heine say, 'Out of my great sorrows I make little songs'—the moral of which is: better put your past tragedies to some sort of use!

In all other respects the situation of one tabooed (or ignored) by the Machine is pretty hopeless. Publishers decline to print your full scores and orchestral parts, and you yourself have to pay for their execution in manuscript—a desperately expensive and most unsatisfactory affair. Again, conductors hate hiring half a hundredweight of manuscript for a single performance, and oh! the revolting aspect those MS. parts gradually assume . . . torn, bescribbled, and in some cases assuming no aspect whatsoever, having been lost on various transits! And when, about a year before my Festival, I reproached the once faithful Henry Wood for not doing something or other, he remarked: 'Well, I'm the only one of them who ever plays your music at all!'—which was true, always excepting the independent-spirited Dan Godfrey.

But the story of an outsider's disabilities is so ugly and

boring, even to think of, that I pass with relief to a more amusing theme—that of my own sins of omission and commission.

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Life has taught me one thing : when people fail to get over (or round) obstacles, it is never wholly the fault of other people. True, what with the terrible tenacity of the English—a quality one thanks Heaven for, since it played a great part in winning the war—combined with our less admirable tendency to nurse our own prejudices ; what with my sex and my foreign musical education, I do think the odds against winning through were overwhelming. Still I could doubtless have played my cards better, specially if, to quote Mrs. Poyser, I could have been ‘ hatched again and hatched different.’

There is a passage in a letter Vernon Lee wrote me in July 1924, of which I felt the truth even then—and now I feel it still more strongly :

‘ I can’t help wondering ’ (she writes) ‘ whether, as much as being a woman, what makes a comparative vacuum round some of your work is not, perhaps, that you sometimes scatter people’s feeble wits—which of course come back to console themselves by pooh-poohing—with the tremendous *attack*, in the Italian musical sense, of your personality and your West-wind “ sausing and brausing.” ’ (*storming and stressing*).

This is fair comment, but, as I used to point out to people who complained of the ‘ sausing and brausing ’ of the Suffragettes, to swim gracefully down-stream is easy ; but if the current is against you, or even trying like Uncle Klingeborn in *Undine* to draw you under, it is not so easy !

Nevertheless I am sure it was as Vernon said. My friend Madame de Polignac, making the acquaintance in Paris of that very grand gentleman Graf Seebach, Intendant of the Dresden Opera, and thinking to start a pleasant subject of

conversation, asked him if he knew her friend Miss Ethel Smyth. 'Know her!' cried the Graf, 'I should think I do know her!' and he went on to say that should he spy me in the streets of Dresden he would leap into a *faker* and leave the town by the next train. Hearing which I said to myself, 'that then was the reason why in spite of the huge English public at Dresden he wouldn't produce *Der Wald*! My "attack" was more than his dignity could put up with!'

Again, in this book I have quoted a very pertinent remark of Julius Röntgen's; that though professional life brushes the bloom off your spiritual independence, still *to live by music, you must live in music*. This I never did in England. I was country bred, couldn't sleep or work in London, and for my particular job needed quiet, the company of a big dog, and, I confess, the satisfaction of an insensate passion for games to which I have already pleaded guilty. Sitting in my so-called garden—really a flattened-out bit of the rough field once browsed on by those former occupants of my two living rooms, the donkey and the pony—bicycling and walking across the heather with Marco (and later with his successor, Pan I) I peacefully worked as hard as slow workers have to work, and slept like a top.

But the chief reason why I did not live in, but outside music was, that the atmosphere of music life in London was one I could not breathe with comfort. Quite apart from personal difficulties, and for subtler reasons than sex, I felt like a stranger; I, who even as half-baked neophyte had associated with people for whom music was a sacred thing—people like Frau Schumann, Levi, Nikisch, Brahms, the Herzogenbergs, the Röntgens, the Griegs, Tschaikowsky, Dvořák, Kirchner, and the rest; I, who had won cognisance of the part played by music in the lives of average Germans, from mediatised Princes to hotel porters; who had learned the meaning of passionate unqualified devotion to the ideal

of which music is the soul and the vestment. It is obvious that under present conditions things must be—and I am told they are—very different in Germany, but I am speaking of forty years ago.

Of this spirit I perceived scant traces in England. But for a few foreigners domiciled here, like the von Glehns, Auguste Manns, or Henschel, no one seemed aware that music is religion, mathematics, passion, tragedy, comedy, what you will ; not a clumsy machine knocked up for semi-industrial uses, and disguised in the cast-off clothes of some down-and-out fifteenth cousin of the Muses. And feeling thus in every fibre of my body, I doubt not that in contact with other musicians it worked up to the surface, and did not conduce to their making a pet of the fierce white crow that had flown uninvited into their peaceful black midst.

Then there were many occasions on which the interloper deliberately queered her own pitch ; for instance, by leaving the field of action in order to devote two years to the cause of Woman Suffrage at that critical moment of a musician's career when headway is being made at last. Yes ! suddenly, in the year 1910, after a couple of orchestral concerts I gave and conducted, the Press (which hitherto had not smiled on me), led by *The Times* and Mr. Barrett of the *Morning Post*, gave me some of the most wonderful reviews I ever had—reviews such as I was not to have again till the launching of *The Prison* in 1931 at Edinburgh, and again from the Manchester Press when Beecham revived it at my Festival.

Perhaps if I had stayed at my post and tried to keep the personal home-fires burning, things might have been different . . . but I doubt it ! Reading Mrs. Hamilton's recently published 'Newnham'—really an informal biography of the late Mrs. Sidgwick, who, like her husband, Professor Sidgwick, was one of Newnham's creators—is to realise afresh the stealthy, consistent, absolutely inflexible

opposition to women's advancement that men were able and willing to put up not so long ago. In 1910 the Press nobly led those obdurate animals, conductors and selection committees, to the water; but they declined to drink, and all that happened was Hauptmann's classical stage direction 'Night and Dead Silence'—a fact I never noticed at the time, for only one thing existed for me during those two years, the Enfranchisement of Women.

Need I say that I do not regret my action, and should do the same again? But we know that 'qui va à la chasse perd sa place,' and the further Nemesis for this lapse was, that no sooner was I back from Egypt, whither I had fled in the winter of 1913 in order to write *The Boatswain's Mate*, than war broke out . . . and therewith my carefully built up connexion with Germany (which was to have culminated in February 1915 with *The Wreckers* at Munich and the *première* of the *Bo'sun* at Frankfurt) collapsed for ever and ever!

Finally, to conclude the *mea culpa* list, attention to business was sometimes interrupted, as readers of this autobiography will have guessed, by an inordinate flow of passion in three directions—sport, games, and friendship.

Such is the list of causes of misfortune the blame for which must be laid at my own door. But a fact far more important than any other has yet to be mentioned—one of which the majority of gifted women must be aware, though perhaps classing it among truths it is wisest not to drag out into the open. *There is a bottomless cleft between man's way of feeling and woman's*, and it comes out in their work. On certain fields a man of ordinary calibre will at times be conscious of something that antagonises him, and leave it at that. But if it is a question of a feminine work *in music*, remembering that so far women have done nothing great in that art he will decide *à parti pris* that his discomfort cannot possibly be due to his own limitations, nor be caused

by anything as creditable to the woman as originality ! Now a really big musician, perceiving a note not hitherto sounded in music—I don't mean some clap-trap bid for effect but *a mode of feeling that differs from his own*—considers it important as expressing something he cannot say himself ; at which juncture I will remind readers of a saying of the great Leibnitz : *A woman knows everything that a man cannot learn.*¹ (Why, of course ! that's one of the reasons Jehovah made her !)

As illustrating that deep, deep cleft take 'Wuthering Heights'—a book no man could have written. In this country literature never dropped out of the running, as did, so mysteriously, music, consequently our instinct is far stronger in literature than in art. Yet I am convinced that if 'Wuthering Heights' were written to-day, even if none knew it to be the work of a woman, a mort of male hackles would rise all the world over.

Now if anybody thinks that herewith a reproach is levelled at men, that person (forgive me) is being rather stupid. On the contrary it is a tribute to male fineness of skin as well as a bouquet offered, left-handed, to the peculiar quality—the *originality*—of woman's mind, which, unless accompanied by 'sex appeal' and all sorts of funny things like that, is apt to antagonise ordinary men.

Curiously enough, since writing the above paragraphs a letter addressed by Maurice Baring to Vernon Lee has come into my hand, in which he quotes a remark from a German article I never saw about *The Wreckers*. The critic puts his finger exactly on what I mean, though he does not rightly diagnose the 'something' which, he says, at first repelled him and afterwards carried him away ; for half the pronounced 'individuality' he speaks of is really sex-colour. The letter seems to me so interesting that I have included it in Letter Section IV, p. 319.

Finally, to come back to really first-line people who

¹ 'Eine Frau weiss Alles was ein Mann nicht erlernen kann.'

even before Time has done its taming work are capable of perceiving and hailing a mode of feeling different to their own, remember that *outsized musicians* are seldom bred elsewhere than in countries where an antique civilisation has been constantly fed by never flagging productive forces ; the sort of civilisation that cannot be vamped up in a quarter of a century in a country stricken with musical dumbness three hundred years ago like England.

Meanwhile, as audiences do not consist of the Faculty, and as most men who love music probably have a large dose of woman in their make-up (and we of course return the compliment !) I do not think the future looks too black for women composers who have something to say and are not afraid of saying it after their own fashion—even at the risk of at first repelling listeners who are subconsciously on the look out for a style to which they are broken (see the letter just referred to ; it really repays study).

And now, having given as dispassionately as I can my own explanation of the state of things it was hoped the Festival might rectify, I confess that though, after the combined onslaught of Argentina and deafness, acquiescence set in, I still occasionally address humble requests to the B.B.C., who, whether we like it or not, set the pace in music to-day. One request I have plied them with for years—a persistency which rivals that of the man in Alphonse Daudet's *L'Immortel*, who, ignored by the Académie Française, registered himself as 'Candidat Perpétuel' for the palms. Up to now this request has not been granted, but nevertheless I cannot refrain from depositing a floral tribute on the steps of Broadcasting House and saying, that never have I received more courteous letters than those in which that Institution year after year signifies its readiness to 'consider this point.' Indeed on the article of tact, good manners, and friendliness, Sir John Reith's Brigade could in my humble opinion walk straight into any Embassy. And if these charming epistles

have little outcome on the drab field of actualities, is not that one more qualification for a diplomatic career?

But in private no doubt the old Adam reasserts himself, and meditating possible reactions after the strain of so much politeness I dozed off one day . . . and presently found myself peeping over the shoulder of a young man who was writing a letter (not very ladylike behaviour, but in dreams we sometimes do things that, let us hope, are not among our usual habits). And this is what I read :

“DEAR BILL,—Delighted forgather 10.30 to-morrow Walton Heath Club House.

Re the Jubilee Jamboree I really believe that with this Set Piece over, we’ve finally got Old Ethel away with the empties (I only hope she won’t be re-bottled !) Still in spite of Ye Festyvall of Musicke we really can’t inflict a whole evening’s Ethelian broadcast on the trusty commons of England. They’d certainly revolute.

Personally from the little I know of her I’m rather addicted to La Vieille and Seb says she made him rock the lift with merriment when they were coming up this a.m. But damn it—she’s 75 or 95—I forget which—and this can be her Close Up and Final Fade Out (‘To Music of transcendental beauty !’)” . . .

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Here, alas ! I woke up, and so greatly did that letter delight me that I should shrink from disappointing the writer by ever again reminding his august Overlords of my existence, were it not for a reason it is hard to express decently. But I will try.

(c) TWO ESTIMATES

It would be useless and falsely modest to make a mystery of what most readers will have read between the lines of this story—that all my life, as regards the worth of my contribution to music such as it is, I have been confronted by

two opposing estimates—one made in Germany, the other in England. And even as one single blameless citizen was not enough to save Sodom and Gomorrah from a fiery doom, so one single voice chiming in with Germany from the pages of *Grove's Musical Dictionary* was powerless to change a consistent cold trickle of neglect, for which, as we have seen, the Press has not been invariably responsible, into the other thing. Time can generally be trusted to show which of two divergent judgments is correct, but what chance has Time in the case of perishable manuscripts rotting on the upper shelves of various music shops?

'We'll make an Album of Smyth Records,' said Sir Thomas, and we planned it all out and I went into matters. Alas! no firm will risk about £500 in the case of music that is never played—nor have I a husband (as Delius had a wife) to provide funds for such admirable purposes!

And so, in default of any other way out, I have at odd moments been compiling a sort of Doomsday Book for the use of my heirs—that is, a list of all my (extant) opuses and where the material is to be found. Some of the orchestral parts are rather repulsive objects, I fear, but anyhow they are correct and usable. That I have seen to myself. And together with the Doomsday Book will house another booklet, namely a small Annex consisting of a collection of foreign opinions of my work as expressed in French and German reviews—opinions that at last won me a publisher (and a friend), Director Hertzka of the Universal Edition, Vienna. If it seems a childish act to have compiled this Annex, I will only plead that I determined not to do it till I could contemplate those foreign estimates calmly, and without saying bitterly to myself, 'Ah! if these views had only obtained in England!'

That moment of . . . not indifference exactly, but of acceptance, and of understanding how all this was inevitable, has now arrived, and as most of the reviews are in German my unfortunate heirs won't feel obliged from loyalty and

affection to read them ! Meanwhile it amuses me to think that someday after my death, when all traces of sex have been reduced to ashes at the Woking Crematorium (so handy !) someone will very likely take me up as a stunt—no extravagant assumption, seeing what subjects attain Stunt-Rank in these days ! Then, together with the assembling of my musical remains, this Annex will be available, and the Stunt-Raiser, lifting his eyebrows, can either burst out laughing (‘Oh, come ! you can’t put that across in England !’) or he can have those pages made into a fan and therewith fan the flame of the Stunt. And thus, someday, I may make friends, musically, with those I cannot get at in my lifetime.

Yes, reader . . . even now, at an hour when perhaps all passion should be spent, it sometimes saddens me to think that during my lifetime I have had no chance of making myself musically known to my countrymen and women as I have done in books—more or less. Yet rather less than more. Knowing nothing of astronomy I have boldly affirmed that it is the burning core of planets that differentiates them from dead moons, and composers like other creators can tap at will that fiery furnace which is their own heart. But in letters I only profess to be a humble autobiographer, equipped with a bucket which I let down as far as it will go into my private well of truth.

(d) ‘THE PRISON’

Meanwhile four years ago the anguish of a certain episode indicated that at one point anyhow passion was still smouldering. And those who, reading this book, have recognised it for what it is—a cairn piled up half unconsciously, stone by stone, in memory of the chief good life has brought me—will guess that the incident concerned one who has been dead twenty-eight years ; Harry Brewster.

Once long ago I confided to an Italian that because so much of the 'Vita Nuova' was beyond me I had laid it aside. 'Take it up again,' he said, 'there are wings one feather of which added to one's own enables one to rise over the rocks and brambles of life as one could never rise without it.'

I think the same is true about H.B.s' book *The Prison*, parts of which I set to music—as I had always dreamed of doing some day.

This work, gloriously started at Edinburgh in 1931, was killed a fortnight afterwards in London. Never mind how or why. And if the incident half broke my heart it was chiefly for the following reason.

After that London performance, as after the first production in Edinburgh, showers of letters and postcards from unknown listeners-in proved that Harry Brewster's spirit, conveyed in certain phrases that have been to me again and again in my life like a lifebelt thrown to a weak swimmer, had similarly helped others whom grief had all but submerged. 'I shall never again brood over the "sorrow of my wasted life,"' wrote one. 'Thank you for passing on by your music the hand of H. Brewster to a stupid, blind, bedridden old woman who will now cling to it for the rest of her life,' wrote another. 'O the triumph of that trumpet call!' ¹ cries a third, 'it lifted my heart out of the grave I had buried it in two years ago and now I can go on living.' . . .

When *The Prison* was dropped, that this should happen to what those whose opinion I care for most think the best thing I have ever done—that the history of the Mass should repeat itself forty years later—was hard; but the sharpest sting lay in the thought that many unhappy people would now be cut off from comfort it was in my friend's power to give them. Mercifully, at the Festival concert they organised for me, the B.B.C. gave Sir Thomas a glorious chance, which

¹ *The Last Post*.

he gloriously took, of leading *The Prison* forth from the tomb ; and after the subsequent performance in Manchester once more my heart was gladdened by communications from strangers in the style of those quoted above.

Having said which I pluck up courage and confess that among the prayers occasionally addressed by me (in spite of the views of 'Bill's' correspondent) to the B.B.C., the chief is that part of *The Prison*, perhaps Part II, should figure in their Symphony Concert Series—not as an item in a personal Festival but in the natural course of things. It doesn't seem much to ask, and unless they have some age-limitation statute on the lines of the one in 'Alice in Wonderland' ['All persons above a mile high to leave the Court'], perhaps some day they will grant this request.

At this point I seem to hear the author of *The Prison* saying : ' Even if my book and your music were to be swept off the face of the globe, do you really believe in the depths of your heart that it would matter so very much ? Think of the splendid wastefulness of nature, how she never looks round, never counts her losses, but is creating, destroying, creating, and again destroying all the time ! '

My answer is, that *when the wind is not in the East*, I can sometimes rise to these heights about my own work, but never about records left by one who possessed the divine gift of helping others to bear their appointed load of sorrow and to face defeat and death with a smile. (I may add that H. B. was his own pupil ; like my friend Clary, ' jusqu'en face de la mort il a gardé son sourire,' and to tell the truth one of his last intelligible remarks was a rather ribald and exceedingly amusing pun.)

Being no metaphysician, I cannot give an ' A.B.C. Digest without Tears ' of anyone's philosophy, let alone H. B.'s, but the general idea of the book¹ is a discussion carried on by four people round about a manuscript which

¹ *The Prison*, by H. B. Brewster (with Memoir by E. S.). Heinemann.

one of them has found, and which is supposed to have been left behind by an escaped Prisoner ; that this is really an allegory, the Prison being Self ; and that according to the Prisoner the only ' success ' that matters is somehow, anyhow, to find your way out of that Prison. Whatever mess you have made of your life, however much the world may look on you as a failure, you will pass the Great Examination if, instead of concentrating on personal triumphs, you have first sought the Kingdom of God. Only in this writer's mind that Kingdom stands for various things at which the Church and the moralists would cry out in horror !

I do not say I can follow every turn of the discussion that sways to and fro across that manuscript. But the Prisoner's own words, printed in the book in italics, can be understood by anyone, and it is my belief that being lodged in a human frame, most creative spirits have to fight for the particular form of emancipation towards which we see him gradually winning his way. For some, of course, it is a harder road than for others, but the Prisoner assures us that all can travel it and eventually reach the goal. ' We are full of immortality,' he says ; ' it stirs and glitters in us under the crust of Self like a gleam of sirens under the ice ; and any blow which breaks this crust brings us into the company of the Eternal Ones, whom to feel is to be as they. That blow you will surely strike somehow, you who live and die. The film you have spread you will likewise rend ; surely, surely you must slip into Heaven.' And he further declares that emancipation may come in countless ways. A moment of joy, despair, passion, or kindness—a sight, a sound, a dream, or perhaps even something that ranks in the official catalogue as a sin, may set you free. For ' the emancipator tears the film as he chooses, with dawn-rose fingers of adoration, and fiery fingers of enthusiasm ; but also with the scarlet hand of passion and the livid hand of death.' (Anything will do to snap your bonds, it would seem,

except orthodox repentance for classical sins ! Of that there is no mention !)

To quote one or two other passages which, once read, are not easily forgotten, is perhaps the best way to give an idea of the quality of Brewster's thought—for instance, the beautiful passage describing a first glimpse of possible deliverance. 'In the faint grey morning I heard a sound as of distant surf. I breathed a breath of the Ocean, and it seemed to me that I was as a doomed ship, whose crew—a motley crew of hopes and thoughts and passions—had suddenly recollected that they could not drown, but would surely reappear, and, drenched with the brine of Oblivion, man some new craft—putting their pride again in some gallant ship of Self, till its sails, too, hang in rotten shreds and pitiful timbers give way once more.'

Finally, his passing being now close at hand, the Prisoner hears a voice telling him that at last he has learnt his lesson—the lesson not to say *me and mine*. 'It is well so far,' says the voice, 'now taste also the death !'

'Then let there be banners and music !' cries the Prisoner—and far off, gradually coming nearer and nearer, you hear that trumpet-call my unknown correspondent spoke of. 'This is no leave-taking—I am not even going home' (he has got there, you see). 'I have nothing that is mine but a name, and I bow down in my Dream of a Day to the Life Eternal.'

.

I intended the above passage to be the last and was about to write two words below it, 'The End,' when a perturbing thought arrested my pen. This being part of the story of a prolonged effort some of which was apparently fruitless, is it possible that a feeling of anything dimly approaching sadness should have been conveyed to the mind of the reader ? If so, this book is a fraud and should be shot into the first dustman's cart that passes. But fantastic as the idea of its producing such an impression seems to the writer, to be on

the safe side may I refer readers to a fable alluded to in one of Harry Brewster's letters,¹ about an old man who, dying, bequeathed to his three sons a field in which was buried, so he said, a treasure. No sooner was he dead than they all started digging, the consequence of which was that every year the ground yielded richer crops. And that was the treasure.

So it is with most lives, I believe ; so it has been anyhow with mine. Blessed with friends, with health, spared the most wearing, the most disheartening form of the inevitable struggle for existence, whatever has or has not been achieved the days have been gloriously spent in the open. And if, digging from morn till eve, one has not unearthed exactly what one expected, all the while the treasure was being found.

I do not pretend there have not been times of sadness, of frustration, even of despair. But as Harry Brewster writes in one of his letters : ' I walked all the way back, sad and happy. Never mind the sadness, *it is always about the perishable self and therefore does not exist*' . . .

After all, then, the Prisoner shall speak the last word for me : ' I thank you days of hope and pride . . . I thank you, lamentable solitude . . . and you, shades of those that loved me ! . . . LET THERE BE BANNERS AND MUSIC ! '



Jan. 1, 1896.

¹ Letter Section III, p. 232.

LETTER SECTION IV

(JULY 1893 TO MARCH 1894)

(A)

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN LADY PONSONBY AND E. S.

[*Lady Ponsonby had been rather ironical about what she called my 'royal culte.' I said, in self-defence, that all closed communities are interesting as study—the small bourgeois musical world at Leipzig, the episcopal one at Lambeth, or that far more curious genus, Royalty. If she was too old a courtier to see where the difference lies, tant pis (to use her expression) for her.*]

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

July 26, 1893.

. . . For instance the other day at Farnham Castle, as on specially clerical occasions at Lambeth, I wished you were there to secretly enjoy with me at the same dinner table the incongruities, shams, and pomposities, and yet the real issues and excellencies—things you can't get unless you come into touch with the people. Thus, as regards Royalty, clearly as you feel its great and strong sides, you have seen certain unavoidable poisonous exhalations undermine so many courtiers' constitutions that you are inclined to *parti pris* on this subject.

Again, think of me—a female Ishmael in the English musical tribes—and do not forget that it was thanks to the Empress, and to the fact that these great ones thought well of me for her sake, that the Mass was heard at all.

You were pleased that Levi wrote to Princess Christian that it was the strongest and most original work that had come out of England since Purcell's time ; do you realise that if he had sent a Round Robin to that effect to all the authoritative *Musicians* in England, beyond enraging them it would not have had the very faintest effect ? As it was, the Duke of Edinburgh (whom I don't even know, but who knew about the Balmoral performance) said, 'As Barnby too thinks so well of it, let it be done.' Again you and your boys are in a world where any excellence and fitness jumps quite naturally to the eye. But for Bob, who has no interest, no money, no Grey and Ponsonby relations, in short nothing to bring him *automatically* into the lime-light, it might be very useful if his sister were well thought of by *les sommités*. Why not face obvious facts like these ? . . .

I ask you to believe, once for all, this : Whatever my faults and weaknesses I think I could ask your astral body to accompany me, no matter whom I am with—royalties or cooks—and be certain it would hear or see nothing but the things you know of and might see when we are together. . . .

The odd thing is I believe you do know this, but you have fallings away from faith which grieve me. Because where I deeply love I do away with the very smallest point of interrogation as regards the loved being ; and that makes the crash when it does come (as with Lisl) so terrible. I don't understand how love can be without a faith and trust which would stand unshaken before all the contrary witness of earth, heaven, and hell. . . .

(Good Lord ! How I must care what you think to write all this ! There's not a soul breathing for whose fair judgment I'd write half a sheet on this subject.)

P.S.—Another thing I can't help adding. The way all you courtier-breeding families think each other vulgar (for you are quite right in thinking the Greys stand at the top of the Black List in other courtier families' eyes, and as outsider I can watch this game and enjoy it) is really rather funny. Myself it seems to me to be only a difference

in the way of doing the thing (a big difference I admit). But whether the fruit they produce—fitness for any office about Court and success in obtaining it—will equalise their methods in the eyes of the Great Judge, I don't know. I see no harm in pursuing any sort of career, but it is curious to see how everyone thinks the other people set about it in an odious way. . . .

[To this letter I got an extraordinarily mild reply ; and as regards her lack of faith, whether real or simulated, very touching almost apologetic reassurances. But I had obliquely glanced at a dangerous subject : ' influence in high places—Greys, Ponsonbys, etc.'—which elicited the following protest.]

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

Osborne Cottage,
August 3, 1893.

. . . I suppose you have been studying the old Gilray print (I have it) in which my grandfather and his eighty-two relations appear as fleecing the nation. We analysed them and found that only three or four were relations, among them Halifax and Lord Durham—according to Mill the ablest Governor-General of Canada we ever had. . . .

I feel inclined to do battle for the Greys, one of the Whig governing families certainly, but independent and disinterested almost to a fault and certainly not courtiers. My grandfather had *le courage de ses convictions* and gave his relations office if they were the *fittest*. He made his son-in-law Governor-General of Canada because he knew Lord Durham was the strongest man he could send ; and so about Sir George Grey, his cousin, grandfather of the present Sir Edward Grey, the Radical ; and he used to laugh at the H. B. caricatures, got up principally by the *unfit* relations he refused to help.

Then my uncle Charles Grey, Henry's predecessor, was appointed here because he wrote such able papers for the War Office that they thought he would be a good man to coach the Prince Consort in English military ways.

Not because I was his niece but because old Duchess of Sutherland *saw me act* at Wrest, etc., and knew I could walk and ride and so on, and advised the Queen to appoint me Maid of Honour. Again Henry was appointed through Lord Clarendon, as being exactly fit, from experience of five Lord Lieutenants, for the post of private secretary, and so on ! If ever Charles Gore becomes Archbishop of Canterbury I daresay ignorant people will be found to say ' Oh, of course ! his mother was a Ponsonby ! '

As for the Greys, they were impossible, odious, perhaps, but *not* courtiers ! (I don't apologise for all this for you won't read it ! . . .)

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

August 12, 1893.

. . . You do me only justice when you say I am not jealous even of friends on the first line, let alone the second or third. Perhaps it is laziness, or perhaps supreme conceit in the conviction that where I choose to be first I can be.

When I was in the most devoted stage of my affection for — I did all I could to patch up the beginning of the falling off of her *culte* for — ; it was all turned against me, but that didn't signify. . . .

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

Osborne Cottage,

August 24, 1893.

. . . About Abergeldie. My wishing you to come has nothing to do with the possibilities. How long we stay here, whether this Court mourning interferes with the Emperor's plans, etc., etc., I know not. One of the things I have learned (one must learn something even to be of the *very* small use one is here) is not to ask questions, and consequently not to know—from dining, to going to the end of the world—ten minutes beforehand what is expected of one. For instance, I went on board Prince Henry's

yacht the other day, got home at twenty to nine, and found a message to dine with the Queen—which left me ten minutes to dress and get there.

The same about travelling ; I go, or don't go, exactly like a bundle, and as I am told. Sometimes, as at Florence, I like my fate very much ; at other times . . . well, not so much ! . . . but that is enough. . . .

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

Leipzig.

September 1, 1893.

. . . It has been rather wonderful seeing the profound impression the Mass makes on old friends too, as testifying to the amount of *grim work and application* there is behind it. I wish you could, if you have a chance, impress this on the Empress, who expects me to turn out opuses for the market as do the usual musico-mechanics. She won't understand that no successes on the second line of effort could ever tempt me, and that I would far rather die having hopelessly aimed at the best all my life than earn £500 per annum on by-paths. Bah ! . . .

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

Frimhurst.

September 14, 1893.

. . . I don't like the sound of the bell you have on the table at Norman Tower so bought you a little one in Heidelberg. I believe it's a liturgical bell, but I can't help that and am sending it if I can find a box. It's a nice shape and design but a horrible thing to pack. . . .

(*Later.* I've had a brilliant idea . . . cut up an old straw hat and swathe it in that.)

About your speaking voice, it is profoundly true that voices mean more to me than anything almost, and your voice is . . . *you*. Well, sometimes when we are apart, I try to hear it and can't. Anyone else's, yes, but not yours. I remember that in illicit Encyclopædia readings

in bygone years (I would resume them, only alas ! there are so few things I don't know about nowadays !) there was a long jaw about impotence resulting from over-desire. 'I'm all right with other women,' the patient would say to the doctor, 'but that one unmans me.' How I used to ponder over that sentence, and dimly sympathise with the unfortunate man ! I suppose it's that sort of thing about your voice ; I long too violently to hear it. . . .

I have bought a metronome. It will drive me mad, I think, but it is good—like conscience. . . .

Tell me if you appreciate my dear Duchess of Alba. It is strange. I have nothing in common with her except love of sport and games (also that she does everything well that she attempts is a quality one can't help admiring). But she is so fresh and straight, so kind and direct, consequently so immensely *grande dame*, that she dwarfs other people who are cleverer, better looking, and have perhaps a great deal more in common with one than she has. You could cut three nice women out of her, and I felt all this the first moment I saw her. I wonder if you will ? (*How amazed she would be at anyone sitting down and writing such a paean about her !*) . . .

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

September 15, 1893.

. . . Henry has just received a telegram from Sir Henry Loch saying 'Your son wishes to go to the front ; do you agree ?' and a characteristic one from Johnny 'Answer yes.' Of course he must go if he wishes but I shall be anxious. I could not help laughing yesterday hearing the description of his standing over a drunken accompanist at a soldiers' entertainment, and having to shake him up and put him straight on his stool every now and then, and standing with a stern forefinger pointing to the music and a muttered 'Go on.' Margaret and Bobby Spencer said that when sober the man would be their only *culte*, as he played so well even under such circumstances. . . .

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

(On a postcard.)

September 22, 1893.

Palais Royal (not 'Royale'). *Mauvaise honte* (not 'mauvais honte') and so on and so on.

M. E. P.

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

(Anniversary of Lady Revelstoke's death.)

Muirhouse, Davidson's Mains.

October 16, 1893.

. . . All day I've been thinking of you in reference to this time last year when I hardly knew you ; and of the quiet hopeless ache for one's dead that I expect is often on you. And one can do nothing to help but love more and better. . . .

I think these thoughts from a humble background position, and wonder why you like me at all. Not that I ever do think it a self-evident matter (!), but one must be much, and care much and well, to make up for being, as I am with you, merely a sort of autumn afterthought, with no part in your previous joys and sorrows except a curiously living, haunting imagination for them. . . .

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

Balmoral.

October 28, 1893.

. . . Your aversion Wolff played at Lord Borthwick's the other night, and to please me (I believe !) he left off playing *vieux* things and really, *sauf* one or two reachings, played the *Chaconne* and one or two other Bachs splendidly. He told Maggie he saw a look of stony displeasure come into our faces when he played what we didn't like, which made him vow not to do it again. He really is very *bon enfant* and I forgive him 'liking awfully much to play to the Queen.' It is a kind of superstition he shares with so many greater people than he is. (He's *not* a Jew by the by.)

The Household theatricals really very good—it is wonderful what Alick Yorke does with his material. Last night for a change we had professionals in the *Diplomacy* play, which half killed everybody because of the cold, but it was supremely acted.

. . . I have been admiring my virtues (such a change) and wondering how I have lived in this atmosphere of *mesquineries*, jealousy, etc., and never (now I am speaking the *truth* of myself) felt pulled down. No, not virtue, but I think a certain amount of breeding, and being perfectly indifferent, as I was when twenty, makes it even more astonishing to me how people are subjugated by the minor influences that rule everything here. . . .

I told Fritz you declared that by turning your *lawn* golf course into a *long* one they were ruining it, and he is writing you a defence. . . .

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

Abergeldie.

October 31, 1893.

. . . . It is a comfort to be back in the dear little Mains and sit in my corner again and read your letter which has just arrived—a dear, good, tender and true letter. I meditated last night why I said you were restless, when, if my thoughts turn in your direction I feel perfectly restful. . . .

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

November 1, 1893.

. . . I've been thinking about Thomas à Kempis and the 'inordinate love' he goes on so about, and wondering if the constant longing I have for those I love is inordinate? I think not, because it really is mainly that something in the way people like you and H. B. (O what a dissimilar couple!) take life, stimulates, or supplements, or does something to mine which other people fail to do. I think therefore that my desire for your company is as healthy and natural as my desire that the best player on a lawn should play against *me*, for all that calls forth the hidden

resources of strength. That is not the only cause . . . but 'passions' as you are so fond of saying when one is nearing the point. . . .

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

Frimhurst.

November 9, 1893.

. . . Someone said to me the other day, 'the aim and object of the Empress is to convert the Queen and restore Popery in England!' I laughed out loud, whereupon the fool said, 'I'm glad she hasn't succeeded with *you* yet, though she did make you write a Mass.' I said, 'If I turned R.C. I think the Empress would be so disgusted that I shouldn't see much of her afterwards.' To this the answer was, 'Ah! *what a deep woman she must be!*'

I told her that she had given the Prior of the Memorial Church and Monastery she has built at Farnborough (for the remains of Napoleon III, the Prince Imperial and her own), to understand, that if she heard of their trying to convert the parishioners of our Farnborough Rector she would withdraw her subsidy (which I believe is huge). But why take any trouble with a fool like that woman? . . .

The Empress is being so adorable about our having to give up Frimhurst, but I'll tell you about that on Tuesday. . . .

.

LADY PONSONBY TO E. S.

Norman Tower.

December 6, 1893.

. . . I am very sorry you are anxious about your father, for at his age such an attack is serious.

. . . After you were gone I could not shake off some depression. It grieves me to think that any ungenerous word of mine about — may come across your mind when you are with her. I took out a little 'Tommy Kemp' (as she called the *Imitation*) which she gave me after her illness in '83. And when I saw the marks and dates (she always made me read it to her) and remembered the past, all the little treacheries and falsities, the caprice and fitfulness

seemed to smooth out, and the grains of gold which I try to believe are somewhere *au fond* seemed to glitter in my eyes and fill them with tears. After all, I said to myself, what are *you* that you should dare allow your thoughts to dwell on what is amiss in anyone? This, and also one or two rough things I said to you, made me wretched. The consequence was a bad night unrelieved by sulphonal—which I left off as being one of the things I must learn to do without—and to-day depression.

Then came your letter. It did me so much good. I had got to fancy your coming was an act of loyalty, but one sentence set me straight; it began 'Will you ever, *ever* know . . . ' and I was grateful. And now Arthur has suddenly appeared to complete the cure. . . . Now tell me how *you* are, and I shall look for better news from your home.

Yours,
M. E. P.

E. S. TO LADY PONSONBY.

Frimhurst.
January 20, 1894.

[*After describing playing the Mass, etc., at Amsterdam and Leipzig, as in text.*]

. . . You know you have said again and again that a weak point in me is my enjoyment of the un-shoplike life I lead and I always tell you that my instinct says this is (for me) the way to salvation. Now here are two lights on that question.

Julius Röntgen asked, exactly as Levi had, of Act I of *Fantasio*: 'What model did you take? I know no opera on these lines.' I said I took no model and had not even thought of other operas, my memory being so short, but just wrote it to produce the effect I think that kind of opera should make. He was much arrested and said to his wife (a wonderful musician), 'Amanda! she does well! I wish I could follow your example . . . but . . . *we must live*, and to live on music you must be *in it*.'

This made me very thoughtful. If I were a man maybe I should not live outside the world of music, but I'm not a man . . . So no more of that. . . .

(B)

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN VERNON LEE AND
MAURICE BARING

VERNON LEE TO MAURICE BARING.

Florence.

November 15, 1907.

. . . How odd that, given her talent, Ethel should seem unable to make any real impression on her contemporaries. . . .

MAURICE BARING TO VERNON LEE.

January 16, 1908.

. . . The small effect produced by Ethel upon her contemporaries is not, I think, surprising. Apart from the fact that the educated musical public in England is small, Ethel's music—her operatic music at least—is, as a German critic to my mind rightly explained, at first sight *so individual* as to be almost disagreeable. He wrote an extremely interesting article about *The Wreckers*—said that the first time he heard it, at rehearsal, he hated it; and he went to the first night prepared to curse like Balaam (was it Balaam?). When the performance was over he went home meaning to slate it. Then, as he sat down to write he said to himself, 'Is it true that this music is bad, or have I failed to understand it?' He waited. He went back the second night and thought it magnificent.

Then he explained that he considered the reason of this to lie in the *intensely individual* quality of the music. He felt there was something bleak, tempestuous and uncompromising about it, a kind of quality you find in Rodin's sculpture—something which does not meet you halfway,

does not hold out soft arms to embrace you but conquers you with the sword. I think this is rather true.

I heard *The Wreckers* in Prague, badly done and the orchestra played vilely. But I knew the music pretty well from hearing her play it and it struck me as a magnificent thing. . . .

[These correspondents, living out of England, realised as little as the public does that an English composer depends wholly on being taken up by 'the Machine,' which only happens to two or three selected representatives in a generation—a sound commercial principle. (The case of Delius—a composer passionately admired and pushed by a conductor possessed of genius, persistence, and . . . wealth—must be rare everywhere ; but in England it is unique.)

My trouble was never that the public found my music difficult ; I always felt they understood and liked it when given a chance of hearing it ; but the Faculty wouldn't have it at any price.—E. S.]

VERNON LEE TO MAURICE BARING.

June 20, 1909.

. . . I have been reading your new Russian book and I have felt extraordinarily all the long drawn out and delicately fluctuating drama which forms real friendship. It was you, wasn't it, who said that 'being in love' was only a label in shorthand, and that the real contents of the thing was, loving, not loving ; suspecting, believing ; becoming indifferent, minding awfully ; *von Herzen, mit schmerzen ; viel, wenig, und gar nicht ; über alle Massen ; . . .* the whole daisy's worth, only the daisy's petals are *our* soul, not the other one's, and they are all equally truthful.

Well, the same thing holds good of friendship, of any living feeling ; and all this winter I have been turning over, with the leaves of your books, the invisible leaves of my secret living book called *Maurice*, with the headings 'What ! he thinks that ? Oh, how we agree ! . . . No ! I fear he's a bit of a *codino* ¹ . . . There of course he is *really* liberal . . . Why, he is the only person who loves and

¹ Means ultra Tory.

hates alternately like me ! . . . Maurice, can you mean that ? . . . Maurice, you are the greatest possible dear, and the more I know of your doings and feelings and thinkings in your 3rd Class Russian trains, among your fine statesmen, among your books, and among the haycocks, the more I like you ! ’

One has to read little, and to live in great spiritual solitude, as I do, to *savourer* in this way whatever appeals to one, and turn one’s books into chapters of one’s innermost life. Thank you dear Maurice for the feeling of perfect companionship you have, in being yourself, contrived to give me. . . .

(C)

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN HENRY BREWSTER
AND E. S.

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Constanz.

September 10, 1893.

. . . I had not the slightest suspicion that Ernst von Stockhausen was the chief mischief maker in our *imbroglio*. Henceforth he shall have the cold shoulder, and it is a part of my body of which I can lower the temperature to an extraordinary degree. Anyhow as far as I am concerned the keeping up of the feud with the Hildebrands is strategically advantageous. If they are so remarkably appreciative and love us both so dearly, I cannot feel as bitter as gall ; but it is best to maintain the position as it is exteriorly. Once a situation has hardened leave it alone, unless there be some sudden and important reason to put it on the fire again. Don’t you think so ? . . .

. . . You know I am going to England on the 7th for a fortnight. If you let that time pass without making a sign I shall hate you, or try to. But I am not going to make the slightest claim on your time or peace of mind. It cannot be holiday always. Care for me a little when you have time. I believe you have always time to care for me a good deal. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Constanz.

September 21, 1893.

. . . What you tell me of V. Lee and her impression of you pleases me much and makes me sorry that there is not much chance of my meeting her in Florence ; at least no immediate prospect. It could only be on some trip from Rome to Paris or London when I am alone ; as when I have company I don't stop at Florence, in order to avoid unpleasantness about the Hildebrands. And this winter it is not probable that I shall leave Rome before the spring. It is quite possible that I should not like her much, because I am fast becoming more and more weary of opinions in conversation, and do not on the other hand feel the sentimental aspirations you mention in V. L. But she is a remarkable woman and would interest me—and unlike her I care for the interesting. Her works lack a certain stamp of definitiveness and are terribly unequal, but show plenty of power ; a sort of intellectual Rubinstein. It would interest me to discover, if I could under her display of fireworks, what kind of a temperament is hers.

Can you define temperament ? What I have in view is a clear impression or at least a vivid glimpse of the different portraits which have been superposed to produce the composite photo we call an individual. The more vivid the glimpses a person gives me of this kind, the stronger the impression I have of a temperament. It is the revelation of a pedigree, and the more quarterings there are the more interesting is the coat of arms. That is one of the two styles of conversation I care for, when these quarterings come out clearly ; and that is your style. (Of course I don't mean talking about one's self ; that is, generally speaking, only magnifying one's composite photo.) The other style is an idle, playful, graceful drifting of words, that come as the friendly snow seems to fall when one watches it from the fireside and feels cozy. The French are good at this. But the hammering on ideas, the arguing, the sticking to opinions, and the laborious illuminating of

paradoxes—I am tired of it all. German talk. Perhaps this is not V. L.'s style. I don't know her style of conversation, but the oracular tone you speak of rather alarms me as far as sympathy is concerned. Nevertheless I would willingly be one of those who have found her interesting and got small thanks for it. Will you tell her that I thank her for her invitation and will avail myself of it when I can.

One thing complicates my relations with friends of yours ; it is that I cannot say to them : ' Don't mention Miss Smyth to my wife.' If they are sufficiently your friends for you to warn them, or if they know through other persons (as Levi for instance would know through the Hildebrands) how the ground lies, it is all right ; I count on their tact. How is it with V. L. ? If she came to Rome as she did last winter, should I have to avoid her meeting Julia ? . . .

A thing that always astonishes Rod is that we can live so long apart, and run on, each in his mood, and yet manage not to be estranged when we meet. But he understands this sort of thing in quite another way than ours. Our way would be perfect if it allowed of a few things more ; among others more of that inventiveness which the meetings of persons stimulates. And a few other little things that count for more than they are reckoned at—if alluded to at all—in the works of the Fathers of the Church. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

(Written during my father's last illness.)

Rome.

December 31, 1893.

. . . You must indeed be tired out with the uncertainty, the hopes and fears, and the waiting for the end, which, though the best perhaps at that age, will yet be sorrowful. I keep trying to picture to myself your new life and wish I were near you. You know, darling, that you are to tell me everything and that there is to be no nonsense between us.

I have found a suitable dwelling here, so that worry is off my mind, and I have also received permission from the Contessa Cini to remain on here till the new apartment is

ready, so that I shan't have to camp in the streets in the midst of my furniture like Attila in the midst of his chariots.

. . . It has just struck midnight. 1894 begins and reminds me of 1884¹ . . . the happiness and the pain of it!—and what has and what has not come true of our dear hopes. Certainly not all, but a good deal; and, dear one, I am deeply fond of you.

Your H.

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

January 10, 1894.

. . . It cheers me to know that you are in fine spirits and good working form. I don't know why you say I am responsible for this, but I like to think I may be partly guilty in some obscure manner so shall not plead innocent. Perhaps a friend's thoughts are like the four angels that keep guard round a child's bed, even if sometimes they would rather be the fifth angel for whom there is manifestly no place outside! This is a pleasing conceit. I suppose number five must take patience and walk up and down in front of the house with a cigar and a fur collar. Or perhaps be admitted to the sitting-room downstairs with a bright fire, a good armchair, a novel (not one of Dickens' please!) and some brandy and soda at hand . . . Well! go to Leipzig! I will send your bodyguard with you.

. . . Good-night, dear friend. Let me have some of your companionship in writing. You know that it is my treasure.

Your H.

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

February 1, 1894.

. . . I will tell you more about myself and my worldly doings next time. My little cousin is the Girl of the Season. It does not last very long, but I suppose it is very nice while it lasts. Her social tact is wonderful. We exchange services. She teaches me how to deal cards (I mean visiting cards) and I help her to put her ideas in order.

¹ My last year at Florence.

Notwithstanding which combination of talents I am afraid she is going to make a fool of herself for a played-out, penniless Greek, who goes in for the sulfurous style of passion and makes her teeth chatter. She sees her folly—yet the genius of the species clamoureth. Last night I was at a ball—for the sake of her friendly eyes—for the first time since 1866, and profoundly did I bore myself. I look on ; not with a bitter sentiment of the frivolity of these people, (not at all ; I think they are right to amuse themselves in their way ; I can even forgive the grotesque spectacle of hoary-headed ambassadors leading decrepit dowagers through a quadrille) but with the feeling of being so completely out of it that I am at a loss to say if my mood is a superior or an asinine one. I catch sight of myself as of a silent spectator from another world, sitting gravely in a corner with a donkey's head on his shoulders. Or again I feel like a man accustomed to drink raw brandy by the pint, and who has accepted an invitation to suck gooseberry syrup through a straw out of a saucer. And he has to smile and look elated and say, 'This is indeed delightful !'

It may be that all this frivolity will have the effect of making me very serious again, and that I too shall prefer construction to attraction. Perhaps I have sinned these many years in trying to please you directly. If I had served my God as I have served my King ! Do you know I think, dearest, that we shall get back the ring of complete truth in our relations, which I have missed for some time, when we have eliminated—or rather when I shall have eliminated, you have done so some while since—useless desire. Old memories finish by clouding fresh perception . . .¹

E. S. TO H. BREWSTER.

Frimhurst.

February 9, 1894.

. . . It's a comfort to be back after all that rushing about. Papa about the same . . . but you know the terrible ups and downs of that sort of illness, so I won't dilate.

¹ As hinted on p. 270, this difficulty was solved ere long.

The summing up of my various 'Mass' experiences abroad is, that my only chance (really) would be to change my name, dress like a youth, and wear a false (pointed) beard, rather like yours. Julius Röntgen told a Leipzig friend of mine the Committee at Amsterdam were bowled over and the Mass is on the Prospectus for 1894-5. Yet he said, *they are afraid* of the effect of producing a woman's work! And who knows what the end will be when it comes to the scratch.¹ Did I not in the autumn go through it all . . . at Leeds, at Hereford . . . at Birmingham? And Wach says that this sex business will be the paramount difficulty at Leipzig; *that though they won't allow it, it is so!*

Well . . . all I can do is turn more determinedly than ever to work, and leave the rest to time. You know all my natural temptations lie in the direction of wasting time; and there a woman is at a disadvantage from her birth up. She has not the instinct of application, and I ascribe more female failures to this than to lack of talent. And do you know it occurred to me at North Berwick that women have no natural instinct of *grip* on a golf club. Boys have held cricket bats, balls, racquets, as in a vice from the earliest chapters of Genesis downwards through all time, and we unfortunates have only wielded needles and ladles! Well: grip, both at golf and work, is what I have to acquire as a habit. And the odd thing is I adore working desperately when I'm at it. But . . . it is hard not to yield to other far easier solicitations . . . at times.

Do deign to glance at Professor Hilty's 'Glück.' There's a chapter in it on Epictetus, with translations of most of his authentic utterances, that fascinated me. (Did I tell you about Nina asking at a book-shop if they had 'The Maxims of Epictetus' and the shopman said, 'I'm afraid not, madam, but here's another droll book that is selling very well—"The Dolly Dialogues."') . . .

O, do you know I heard two acts of a quite wonderful early opera of Puccini's in Leipzig, *Manon Lescaut*. It enchanted me; quite out of a different world to *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* and all that. Fine character drawing, exquisite

¹ The end was that it was done at none of these places.

music, and all the glamour of later Italian music to boot. Very, very fine I thought. . . .

H. BREWSTER TO E. S.

Rome.

March 26, 1894.

. . . Oh ! don't let me forget a saying of the Duc de Lauzun I must quote for your edification. Take note that his name has remained as of one to whom ladies were very kind. 'Je n'ai jamais voulu devoir une femme à un instant dont elle pût se repentir.' (Pass it on to a certain friend of yours who despises me.)

But I wanted to speak of discipline. Don't you admit that it has various forms? There is no use striving for the kind of abstinence we are not made for. I believe in exterior compulsion, asylums and strait jackets, for morphino-mania, dipsomania and so forth—whenever the body is ill. But for suffering souls I don't believe in reform, I believe in antidotes. The practical problem of morals seems to me to find out the species of coin in which we must pay for self indulgence. What the chaste and temperate call self control is merely the kind of coin in which they pay for self indulgence of another kind : spiritual egotism. The whole thing is a scheme of redemption for the materialists of the soul, sensualists in another key. And the scheme is taught everywhere. No one teaches the other scheme : redemption for the sensualists of the flesh. Yet of these too is the kingdom of heaven.

. . . My little cousin—or niece as you choose—is to be married the day after to-morrow in New York. No more shall she count among the maidens we love to watch dancing in the barn. But there is still Donna Maria Guerriere Gonzaga, who probably thinks her name too pretty to change it. And there is Ninon d'Okraschewska who is a radiant statue—would be compelled by law to manifest her forms in a well-organised state ; and there is Miss Toker under whose instep a grasshopper could pass at ease and whose footsteps gleam in what ethereal dances ?

by what eternal stream? Oh there are lots of them still. Strike up the bagpipes' loudest blast. There is nothing hazy about me, if you please. They are all transient incarnations of the eternal beauty. I sit on the top of the pyramids in company with the forty centuries Napoleon spied there, and watch them winding by. It is very nice and pretty. But the rest, the other thing, is too complicated to play at very often, my dear. The art is long and you must get up early in the morning. Good-bye. Write soon.

Your H.

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The abbreviations used in this Index are :

For Henry B. Brewster : H. B.
 „ The Empress Eugénie :
 Emp. E.

For Lady Ponsonby : Lady P.
 „ the author, Ethel Smyth :
 E. S.

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